

**Putting Elisha in His Place: Genre, Coherence, and Narrative  
Function in 2 Kings 2-8**

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I, W. Brian Aucker, hereby declare that I have composed the following thesis and that it is my own work.

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20 December 2000

## ABSTRACT

Argues that, against the literary contexts of confused royal identities, the comingling of the northern and southern kingdoms, and the anonymity of the weak king of Israel, the prophet Elisha in 2 Kgs 2-8 is portrayed in a manner both royal and divine, performing deeds more typical of the king and YHWH. The answer to the question raised in 2 Kgs 2.14, 'Where is YHWH God of Elijah?', is answered in 2 Kgs 8.1-6: the great deeds of Elisha are the great deeds of YHWH. The portrayal of this prophet with divine and royal characteristics provides textual coherence to a set of narratives often viewed as disparate, based on the wide variety of form and content which they manifest.

Part I (chapters 1-2) establishes the need for the present study. Chapter one argues that an examination of literary coherence in the Elisha narratives is overdue. Chapter two provides a theoretical examination of coherence. While the use of the term 'coherence' has increased in biblical studies over the last twenty years, the field has not reflected adequately upon the question, 'What is coherence?' We conclude that coherence may be viewed variously as 'discourse topic', 'global intention', or 'mental representation'. The chapter closes with the adoption of a model for reading the Elisha narrative.

Part II (chapters 3-4) suggests several narrative contexts which will function as the backdrop for the detailed exegetical work that follows. Chapter three examines the broader contextual themes placed under the figureheads of Jehu, Hazael, and Elisha. In establishing the narrower context, 2 Kgs 1 and 2 are examined. The negative portrayal of the northern king in 2 Kgs 1 is contrasted with Elisha's succession of Elijah, a unique event in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter four explores 2 Kgs 3 and 2 Kgs 8.16-29 and argues for a narrative collapse of identity between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Part III (chapters 5-8) examines a range of narrative details suggesting that the prophet is portrayed as a re-presentation of king and YHWH. Chapter five examines 2 Kgs 4-5 and argues that Elisha acts and is himself acted upon in a manner often reserved for king and deity (e.g., caring for the widow and orphan, feeding, healing, receiving gifts). Chapter six takes a multi-perspectival approach to the two stories of 2 Kgs 6.1-23. The story of 2 Kgs 6.1-7 is examined alone initially. Next follows an exploration of the lexical connections between the two stories. After an examination of the remainder of 6.8-23 we look at the two stories together in relationship to the Exodus and Conquest traditions. In chapter seven (2 Kgs 6.24-7.20) it is suggested that the king is no longer the appropriate representative of YHWH as the prophet again fulfils that role. Four major points are provided as evidence for this. In Chapter eight (2 Kgs 8.1-15), the concluding exegetical chapter, we demonstrate that the portrayal of Elisha mimics the portrayal of YHWH. Both prophet and deity bring life to the dead, the word of the prophet and the word of YHWH are inseparable, and each of their deeds are retold using similar vocabulary.

Our concluding chapter attempts to 'put Elisha in his place' by examining the narrative function of 2 Kgs 2-8 within the wider scope of Kings and the Former Prophets. We provide a possible explanation for what Elisha is actually 'doing' within the book of Kings. After a brief return to the issues of genre and coherence, we consider Elisha's role as a royal figure in relation to that of the king. Next we consider Elisha as a transitional figure (like Joshua) and his identity with respect to the nameless king of Israel. Finally, we consider a 'reversal of history' as we observe the re-formation of a number of former enemies in the Former Prophets. The present study supports the proposal of T. Collins that a 'royal metaphor' once uniting king and people is replaced by a 'prophetic metaphor'. However, with Elisha the metaphor is 'mixed' in an enigmatic figure who manifests prophetic, royal, and divine traits.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 vols. D. N. Freedman (ed.). New York: Doubleday, 1996.
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACEBT	<i>Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie</i>
AcOr	<i>Acta Orientalia</i>
ANET <sup>3</sup>	J. B. Pritchard (ed.). <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. with supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	Bauer, W. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich. Revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic</i> . Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996.
<i>Bib Int</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, 4 <sup>th</sup> ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977.
BIOSCS	Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CBSC	The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament
DCH	Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , 4 vols-. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-.
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
Even-Shoshan	Even-Shoshan, A. <i>A New Concordance of the Old Testament Using the Hebrew and Aramaic Text</i> with an Introduction by J. H. Sailhamer. 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature

FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
Gibson	Gibson, J. C. L. <i>Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar Syntax</i> . 4 <sup>th</sup> ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994.
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch. 2 <sup>nd</sup> English ed. revised by A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
GTT	<i>Gereformeerde Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 4 vols. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner. Revised by W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JFI	<i>Journal of the Folklore Institute</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JLS	<i>Journal of Literary Semantics</i>
J-M	Jouön, P., and T. Muraoka (ed.). <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> , 2 vols. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. Reprint of first edition with corrections. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993.
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JP	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
JSNTSup	Journal for Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
KHAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LB	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
LS	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott. <i>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1889.
LXX	A. Rahlfs (ed.). <i>Septuaginta</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979.
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'université Saint-Joseph</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary

<i>NedTTs</i>	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , 5 vols. W. A. van Gemeren (ed.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
NT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTr	<i>Notes on Translation</i>
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OPTAT	<i>Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
RivB	<i>Rivista biblica</i>
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBLDS	The Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSCS	The Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSS	The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the ancient Near East
SR	<i>Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses</i>
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 10 vols. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H-J. Fabry (eds). Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, D. E. Green, and D. W. Stott. Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1974-1999.
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 3 vols. E. Jenni (ed.) with assistance of C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. Peabody, Mass.: Hendricson, 1997.
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> , 2 vols. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (eds.). Chicago: Moody, 1980.
TynOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UTR	Utrechtsche Theologische Reeks
OuTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
Williams	Williams, R. J. <i>Hebrew Syntax: an Outline</i> . 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.
WOC	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

## CHAPTER 1

### GENRE AND THE QUESTION OF COHERENCE IN THE ELISHA NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

It is evident, however, that collecting the Elisha narratives into one large complex extending over the reigns of three kings gives them no more than a superficial appearance of unity. An analysis of the narratives according to content and form, and an attempt to trace the growth and development of the Elisha tradition, make apparent the diversity of the material.<sup>1</sup>

Jones' comment is representative of recent study of the Elisha narrative in 2 Kings. It concentrates the interplay of several key issues pertinent to the investigation of these stories. Primarily it advances the view that any wholeness these narratives obtain is merely skin deep. Any inspection under that skin will uncover narratives of varying form and content, coupled with a complex tradition that only confirms its fundamental lack of coherence. This chapter examines past and present approaches to the Elisha narrative. It will be important to explore how genre identification has influenced the perception of unity and integration of the narrative comprising 2 Kings 2-8. Particular attention is given to how present concepts and terminology derive from prior scholarly inquiry, especially with regard to oral tradition. In the final sections we look at the issue of coherence and Deuteronomistic integration.

#### The Classification of the Elisha Narratives

The treatment of the Elisha narratives may actually be traced back to the brothers Grimm. Their definitions of the literary genres of folk narrative, along with an interest in oral transmission, were the two aspects of their work that most influenced Old Testament studies.<sup>2</sup> Based on an examination of form, content, and context they classified folklore narrative under the categories of myth (*Mythus*), legend (*Sage*)

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<sup>1</sup> G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*, 2 vols., NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 1:69.

<sup>2</sup> P. G. Kirkpatrick, *The Old Testament and Folklore Study*, JSOTSup 62 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 23.

and folktale (*Märchen*).<sup>3</sup> Although it is commonly held that the Grimm folktales were a product of German peasantry, it has been shown that large editorial changes were applied by the Grimm brothers to the collection throughout its varying editions. Because of this they are neither examples of ‘typical folk compositions’ nor does their final form reflect ‘typical folk narrative.’<sup>4</sup> Kirkpatrick notes that the imposition of a uniformity not originally present urges caution for those who use them to determine the presence of oral indicators. This editorial work of the Grimm brothers also highlights the important role played by the collector and transcriber in such a work.<sup>5</sup> Later form critics were to a great extent dependent upon the classifications delineated in the Grimm’s study of folklore narrative. The initial attempt to apply these genre classifications to the biblical text, and to locate the older oral sources underlying the Old Testament narrative came from Hermann Gunkel.<sup>6</sup>

Although Gunkel wrote *Geschichten von Elisha* in 1925<sup>7</sup>, it is not this work that has had the greatest impact on the study of the Elisha narratives. His greater influence came by way of the application of the narrative categories developed in his 1901 Genesis commentary. These classifications ‘became the base point for classifying all biblical narratives, prophetic stories included.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 76-77. The translations are those used by Kirkpatrick.

<sup>4</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 78. Kirkpatrick relies here upon the work of J. Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: the Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 49-51.

<sup>5</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 24-34, 73. See for example H. Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*, trans. W.H. Carruth, (Chicago: Open Court, 1901); reprint edition with an introduction by William F. Albright (New York: Schocken, 1964), 38. Here Gunkel asserts that the legends (*Sagen*) in Genesis were already very old when committed to writing and makes a comparison ‘with the German *Märchen* where spells and charms are in poetic form.’ This is the English translation of the original introduction of *Genesis in übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). A new translation is now available in H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. M. E. Biddle with a foreword by E. W. Nicholson, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> H. Gunkel, *Geschichten von Elisha*, Meisterwerke hebräischer Erzählungskunst 1 (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1925). Gunkel has chapters on Elisha as Elijah’s successor, the Shunammite, Naaman, the siege of Samaria, and Jehu’s revolt.

<sup>8</sup> R. D. Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories*, JSOTSup 95 (Sheffield: JSOT Press), 12-13. Moore’s first chapter provides a solid study of recent treatments particularly with reference to

Gunkel made it clear that *Sage*<sup>9</sup> was a distinct form of poetry and, as opposed to prose, the more able bearer of religious thought. This in fact held the primacy of place in any differentiation between history (*Geschichte*) and *Sage*.<sup>10</sup>

For religion everywhere, the Israelite religion included, has especially cherished poetry and poetic narrative, since poetic narrative is much better qualified than prose to be the medium of religious thought. Genesis is a more intensely religious book than the Book of Kings.<sup>11</sup>

Besides their poetic quality, Gunkel in his Genesis commentary sets forth a variety of other criteria by which history is distinguished from *Sage*. The former is found in written form while the latter was originally part of an oral tradition.<sup>12</sup> History relates events of a public nature, while *Sage* is characterised by a concern with the private and familial.<sup>13</sup> History and *Sage* also differ in their relationship to the eyewitness account of events. The connection of the eyewitness is vital for history whereas *Sage* is based 'partly upon tradition and partly upon imagination.'<sup>14</sup> Closely related to this is the presence, in *Sage*, of features which are incredible and impossible.<sup>15</sup> A final characteristic enabling the distinction between the two is the presence of anthropomorphisms prevalent in *Sage* but lacking in historical narrative.<sup>16</sup>

Gunkel identified the three main *Sagen* types as historical, ethnological, and aetiological. The historical reflected historical occurrences, while the ethnological

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the classification of the Elisha stories.

<sup>9</sup> Most often in the literature *Sagen* is translated 'legends' which is in keeping with the practice of folklorists (See Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 121 n.59). Given the confusion over the terms *Sage* and *Legende* we will leave *Legende* untranslated. Where we occasionally translate *Sage* we will use the term 'legend'. The term *Geschichte* will be translated as 'history'. These classifications will be explored in due course.

<sup>10</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 10 (German, v). See also H. Gunkel, 'Sagen und Legenden: II In Israel,' in *RGG* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1931), 5:49.

<sup>11</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 3 (German, ii).

<sup>12</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 3-4 (German, ii). See also Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 24, 98-99 for a discussion of these distinctions.

<sup>13</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 4-5 (German, iii).

<sup>14</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 5-6 (German, iii). See also 'Sagen und Legenden,' 5:49. The *Sage* stems in part from historical fact and in part from imaginative fairy-tale (*Märchen*).

<sup>15</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 7 (German, iv).

<sup>16</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 8-9 (German, v).

was concerned with racial and tribal relations. The aetiological were written in order to provide some explanation for the questions asked by primitive man.<sup>17</sup> Within the confines of the Genesis commentary this latter category was discussed more intensively than the historical. It was however, historical *Sage* – the least represented in Genesis – which most influenced the classification schemes of biblical narratives outside of Genesis.<sup>18</sup>

In his later discussions of *Sagen* types, Gunkel viewed the historical not as a sub-type of patriarchal *Sage*, but as a category in its own right.<sup>19</sup> The historical *Sagen* are distinct from the patriarchal (*Vätersagen*) in that they no longer deal with ‘patriarchs’ but with historical persons.<sup>20</sup> There remained, however, a relationship both in the biblical and developmental order between the patriarchal and historical as the impressive historical figures of Israel’s past were elevated to the status of heroes in the historical *Sagen*.<sup>21</sup> The latter also acquired fairy-tale material (*Märchenstoff*). These *Sagen* exist to glorify both God and the ancient men of God (Moses, Elijah, Elisha), through whom God has done great works.<sup>22</sup>

These miraculous narratives are important for *Legende*, a final category described by Gunkel and important for the classification of the prophetic narratives. Gunkel claimed that where the tone of the *Sagen* had changed we are justified in bringing in a new term. Under the term *Legende*, Gunkel set those narratives with a religious or spiritual emphasis. The new tone in this narrative category arose from the influences of the great prophetic movement in tandem with the Babylonian Exile. The result was a narrative style that had lost much of the colour and aesthetic quality of the

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<sup>17</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 24-25, (German, xi-xii). According to Gunkel, these are the same questions that concern modern persons: ‘Hence what we find in these legends [*Sagen*] are the beginnings of human science’ (p.25).

<sup>18</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Gunkel, ‘*Sagen und Legenden*,’ 5:53.

<sup>21</sup> Gunkel, ‘*Sagen und Legenden*,’ 5:53-54.

<sup>22</sup> ‘*Sagen und Legenden*,’ col. 54. This ambiguity between ‘historical saga’ and ‘historical writing’ is resolved if we remember that Gunkel viewed historical legend as the precursor of historical writing. See Moore, *God Saves*, 15

older *Sage*.<sup>23</sup> Thus while *Sage* was a pre-historical development, *Legende* arose in a post-exilic milieu of historical awareness.

Still it is very difficult to pin down exactly what makes the *Sage* different from *Legende* in Gunkel's treatment. To some degree both stand apart from historical narrative in their emphasis upon the supernatural and spiritual dimension. Gunkel in *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* notes the perforated lines between various narrative categories. He defines *Sage* as 'a story where historical persons—or characters thought to be historical—are the effective participants in the action.' *Legende* is then distinct as 'a story with a characteristically spiritual tone.' Here he makes explicit the linkage of *Legende* with saints of the Catholic Church. After defining 'folktale' as 'stories of less sophisticated peoples and circles' he concludes:

In saying this we admit, of course, that the borderlines between these genres are blurred in places and that distinguishing them can sometimes run us into difficulties. Moreover, we sometimes have to cross over from one genre to another, so as not to destroy the internal coherence of content.<sup>24</sup>

This raises the important question of how and to what extent genre distinctions should be allowed to influence the assessment of coherence. Before observing how Gunkel's classifications affected later treatments of the Elisha narrative we will look at his view of the transmission of *Sage*, another area where his concepts are still manifest.

### *A Cycle in Search of a Narrative Home*

Earlier we described Gunkel's view that *Sage* originally derived from oral tradition. Not only so, but even the collecting of individual stories began in the oral period as well.<sup>25</sup> Gunkel presumes a poetic form underlying the present prosaic forms in Genesis. These formerly oral tales were short compositions by individual poets

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<sup>23</sup> Gunkel, 'Sagen und Legenden,' 5:58-59.

<sup>24</sup> H. Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, trans. by M. D. Rutter with an introduction by J. W. Rogerson, (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1987), 26.

<sup>25</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 123 (German, iv).

eventually evolving and transforming, after a long period, into a product of the people.<sup>26</sup> Gunkel recognised that some of these tales are of superior artistry and thus conjectured their origins from 'a class of professional storytellers. These popular story-tellers, familiar with old songs and legends, wandered about the country, and were probably to be found regularly at the popular festivals.'<sup>27</sup>

Gunkel distinguished individual legends from groups of legends gathered by these story-tellers to form legend-cycles (*Sagenkränze*).<sup>28</sup> The original form was the shorter, individual legend, evidenced by its existence as a self-contained unit with a clear introduction and conclusion. Regarding the coherence of these *Sagen* Gunkel argued that everything was subordinate to the action. The consequence of actions, as one element related to the next, was thus one manner in which the story-teller held a narrative together.

The primitive man demanded from his story-teller first of all action; he demands that something shall happen in the story to please his eye. But the first essential in such a story is to him its inner unity; the narrator must furnish him a connected series of events each necessarily dependent on the preceding.<sup>29</sup>

Along with this element, and indeed overriding it as a device for uniting several stories, is the 'journey' which Gunkel considers 'the transition par excellence.'<sup>30</sup> This we shall see is another element of Gunkel's thought that persists in the present understanding of the prophetic legends of Kings. Finally, he observed how various related *Sagen* would attract one another. We should expect all of the stories of Abraham, for example, to eventually coalesce into a single narrative. Larger, more weighty legends were split and used to 'enframe' (*Rahmenerzählung*) the smaller,

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<sup>26</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 38-39 (German, xvii-xviii). For this section we are indebted to Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 28-30.

<sup>27</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 41 (German, xix).

<sup>28</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 42 (German, xix).

<sup>29</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 69 (German, xxxii).

<sup>30</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 81 (German, xxxvii).

inconsequential ones.<sup>31</sup> The eventual loss of the guild of story-tellers contributed to the need to reduce these stories to writing.

With respect to the Elisha narratives, the concept of a cycle of stories is not unusual. Noth, for example, theorised that an Elijah/Elisha cycle arose from unconnected narratives and anecdotes brought together prior to Dtr's time.<sup>32</sup> G. H. Jones discusses both Elijah and Elisha narratives under the rubric of cycle.<sup>33</sup> Bentzen argues for '*cycles of traditions* formed by combination of originally individual legends.'<sup>34</sup> According to Fohrer the Israelites 'assembled the individual stories or cycles in great general works dominated by specific ideas and created systematic presentations.'<sup>35</sup> We might expect the 'sons of the prophets' to take the place of Gunkel's defunct story-tellers as the purveyors of tradition. Regarding the Elijah and Elisha narratives G. W. Anderson writes:

Both cycles were probably handed down by oral tradition for some time before being written. As we have seen, it is natural to think of the prophetic communities as the appropriate milieu; but the popular character of the Elisha cycle suggests that it circulated more widely and for a longer period.<sup>36</sup>

Van Seters holds that the DtrH as the 'authoritative "canonical" tradition' aroused numerous kinds of responses and a 'great diversity of additions.' One such response was the attraction of 'the traditions of a specific group or faction, such as the Elisha cycle of stories.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 80 (German, xxxvii).

<sup>32</sup> M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 68. Unless noted otherwise Dtr = 'Deuteronomist' and DtrH = 'Deuteronomistic History.'

<sup>33</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:64-68 (Elijah); 1:68-73 (Elisha).

<sup>34</sup> A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament I-II*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1952), 234.

<sup>35</sup> G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. D. Green (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), 35. Translation of Ernst Sellin, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., revised and rewritten by G. Fohrer (Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer, 1965).

<sup>36</sup> G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1959), 87.

<sup>37</sup> J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 361. S. Niditch criticises strongly Van Seters' idea of the Deuteronomistic History 'attracting traditions' as if exerting some 'magnetic force' (*Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel [Louisville:

While Van Seters believes the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) to have ‘attracted’ Elisha traditions later, the prophet should theoretically fare better in A. F. Campbell’s proposed ‘Prophetic Record’ which Campbell describes as ‘theologically inspired history.’<sup>38</sup> This hypothesised document which ‘anticipates and prepares for the Deuteronomistic History’ ought to have had a place for Elisha particularly since it is Elisha’s disciples who, according to Campbell, gave this record ‘shape and expression’.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, according to Campbell, only Elisha’s background role in the anointing of Jehu (2 Kgs 9.1) made it into this record. Campbell dismisses the bulk of the stories by citing the tradition history study of H.-C. Schmitt whose work disputes the validity of a pre-deuteronomistic Elisha cycle.<sup>40</sup> However, his reconstruction replaces the idea of ‘cycle’ with a ‘number of collections’.

Schmitt’s analysis of the Elisha narratives and anecdotes abandons the idea that an ‘Elisha cycle’ had been formed and was in existence before the composition of the books of Kings. He rather envisages the existence of a number of Elisha collections, which found their way into Kings at different times.<sup>41</sup>

It seems odd for Campbell to propose Elisha’s disciples as the gatherers of prophetic traditions only to have them neglect the stories about their master.

Questioning at an even more foundational level Kirkpatrick asks, ‘But just exactly how much do we know of how individual stories, let alone whole tradition cycles (or in Gunkel’s case legend cycles) were transmitted?’<sup>42</sup> We raise these issues not to debate the particulars of one tradition history proposal or another. Rather, we wonder how such proposals and the continuing use of a term like ‘cycle’ influence our conception of the coherence of these stories? However we may construe the prior

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Westminster/John Knox, 1996], 115).

<sup>38</sup> A. F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: a Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel 1 – 2 Kings 10)* CBQMS 17 (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986), 105

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 99 n.85 citing H.-C. Schmitt, *Elisa. Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore Study*, 65.

independent existence or later post-deuteronomistic insertion of these stories, it is still fair to inquire concerning Elisha's present narrative function.

### Gunkel's Continuing Influence

Gunkel's classifications and the concept of an underlying oral nature (narrative cycles) have continued to exert an influence in the treatment of the Elisha narratives. Classified most frequently as 'prophetic legends', these narratives derive from oral tradition and have, by one or more historians, been assimilated into Kings. This assimilation is incomplete, however, since the legends do not reflect a historiographic treatment. These legends thus reflect a preliterate period prior to the rise of the classical prophets.<sup>43</sup>

Commentators may, for example, make explicit mention of an oral tradition, gathered and or composed by prophetic guilds, and ending in legend-cycles. J. Gray, in a discussion of the narratives spanning 1 Kgs 17.1-2 Kgs 10.31, makes a distinction common to the treatment of these narratives between those of historical value and others 'rather in the nature of hagiology.'<sup>44</sup> The former are characterised by the connection of the prophet with public, political events of the day, while the latter are of a more private and personal nature with Elisha among the sons of the prophets. In a great number of the Elisha stories we have 'traditions orally preserved by prophetic circles, eventually forming saga-cycles.'<sup>45</sup> According to Gray, their original formation in dervish guilds is evident by the narrow focus of the incidents, the lack of any moral tone, and the predominance of the miraculous.<sup>46</sup>

Gray categorises the stories as: (1) Elisha among the sons of the prophets (2.1-18, 19-22, 23-25; 4.38-41, 42-44; 6.1-7; 13.20-21); (2) anecdotes of the individual Elisha (2 Kgs 4.1-7, 8-37); and (3) Elisha in the setting of contemporary history (2 Kgs 3.4-

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<sup>43</sup> John Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 303.

<sup>44</sup> J. Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: SCM Press, 1977), 371-72.

<sup>45</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 371.

<sup>46</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 372.

27; 5.1-27; 8.7-15).<sup>47</sup> Here it is appropriate to note the blurring of these categories. In one instance Gray argues that we keep the Hazael narrative in the category of history 'in spite of its saga features',<sup>48</sup> whereas elsewhere he contrasts hagiology with saga 'which is of real historical value.'<sup>49</sup> Thus saga is in one instance apparent by the presence of the miraculous and in another instance by its historical value. On one hand 2 Kgs 5 is placed with hagiology arising from prophetic guilds (p.371) but elsewhere is distanced from this background (p.468). Perhaps here we are seeing the ambiguous relations inherent in Gunkel's distinctions. In spite of these fuzzy boundaries commentaries most frequently affix the terms 'legend' (*Legende*) = Gray's hagiology, or 'historical narrative' to the stories involving Elisha. Although the former predominates, often narratives are placed somewhere between these two designations.<sup>50</sup>

G. H. Jones, in his discussion of the Elijah and Elisha cycles, argues for the close link between the two cycles and the likelihood that 'it is to Elisha himself and to his disciples that we are indebted for the preservation of the Elijah narratives.'<sup>51</sup> Differences of style and form are noted within both the Elijah and Elisha cycles, and these differences, along with historical reliability, provide criteria by which individual narratives can be distinguished from one another.<sup>52</sup> In both cycles, the more popular anecdotes, or 'hagiology' as Gray called them, have been combined later with primary narratives of a more historical nature.<sup>53</sup> Jones notes that it is unlikely that any consensus will be reached among those treating the 'pre-deuteronomistic and deuteronomistic redaction of this material.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In the Aramean invasion of 6.8-23, Gray claims Elisha is a figure of legend or saga in the setting of contemporary history (p. 512). The incidents of 6:24-7:20 were taken from a wider ranging historical narrative and serve to build a prophetic biography (p. 517).

<sup>48</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 471.

<sup>49</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 31-32.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:67.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:64-65, 69.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:65 (Elijah cycle), 1:69-70 (Elisha cycle).

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:65. Steven McKenzie similarly points out that there is no consensus on the

Jones is not explicit as to the presence of oral tradition although it seems to be implied in the application of terms like legend and saga. He appeals to prophetic circles as those who preserved and transmitted these cycles and, in following Schmitt, he considers the literary variations in the text as indicative of varying traditions, unified within the book of Kings at some point in its developmental history.<sup>55</sup>

Introductions to the Old Testament also analyse the Elisha material according to Gunkel's oral tradition and classification scheme.<sup>56</sup> O. Eissfeldt acknowledges the validity of Gunkel's demand that we should move toward a 'creative, synthesising history of the literature', over against the 'critical, analytical introduction.'<sup>57</sup> According to Eissfeldt, because Gunkel's method assumes an oral tradition preceding the literature, his method allows us to 'trace the history of the forms and materials' further back in time and spatially beyond Israel's borders.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, however, such a programme cannot be consistently carried out according to Eissfeldt, since a study of the history of literature itself remains dependent upon the results of literary analysis.

Thus, valuable as Gunkel's scheme was for understanding of the smallest units, it has contributed little that was original to the tracing of the composition and

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complex developmental history (*The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Books of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, VTSup 42 [Leiden: Brill, 1991], 95). See also T. W. Overholt, *Cultural Anthropology and the Old Testament*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 28. Along with the work of H.-C. Schmitt previously mentioned other tradition-historical studies include H. Schweizer, *Elischa in den Kriegen. Literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung von 2 Kön 3; 6,9-23; 6,24-7,20*, SANT 37 (Munich: Kösel, 1974) and H.-J. Stipp, *Elischa-Propheten-Gottesmänner; die Kompositionsgeschichte des Elischazyklus und verwandter Texte, rekonstruiert auf der Basis von Text- und Literarkritik zu 1 Kön 20.22 und 2 Kön 2-7*, ATSAT 24 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1987).

<sup>55</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 1:67 for Elisha's disciples as 'bearers of the tradition.' It seems odd that Jones should persist in using the term 'cycle' if in fact Schmitt is correct that the deuteronomistic historian was dependent upon a variety of traditions (1:73).

<sup>56</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 22.

<sup>57</sup> O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 4.

origin of the books, at least so far as those books and groups of books are concerned which are more than merely a loose collocation of those smallest units.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Eissfeldt believes that Gunkel's program, valuable for shorter narrative units, is not helpful when it comes to medium or larger literary structures and especially whole books. Yet the Elisha narratives may be the exception that proves Eissfeldt's point since, according to Van Seters, they are 'a loose collection tied together by statements of the prophet's itinerary from one point to another.'<sup>60</sup> It would follow that the Elisha narratives, being a collection of shorter units, are fit objects of Gunkel's program.

Eissfeldt perceives in these narratives a variety of types: legends, sagas, and historical narratives.<sup>61</sup> A narrative qualifies as a legend where a person (prophet or priest), place, or occasion is of religious significance.<sup>62</sup> Some legends are linked with the specific regions of Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal; and in these legends Elisha is leader of a prophetic circle. 'To these belongs the cycle of legends of II ii which culminates in Elijah's ascension and the transfer of his prophetic power to Elisha.'<sup>63</sup> The miracle stories of 2 Kgs 4.1-7 (oil supplied to pay debt); 38-41 (stew made eatable); 42-44 (feeding of one hundred); 6.1-7 (axe head floating); and 13.20-21 (dead revived by Elisha's bones) are also associated with this cycle. These pre-exilic, prophetic legends were designed to exalt the holy man.

The prophetic legends, on the other hand, appear to be compositions which have developed freely and organically, though they too are naturally enough not free of tendentiousness, in that they set out to glorify their heroes, or rather the power of God which is revealed in them, not infrequently at the expense of its opponents. It is evident that in pre-exilic Israel, so long at any rate as the seers and prophets really had a contribution to make, they were more men of the people than were the priests.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 305.

<sup>61</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 294-295. Eissfeldt (p.46) sub-classifies the legends as 'cult-legend', 'prophetic legend', and 'martyr legend.'

<sup>62</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 34.

<sup>63</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 294.

<sup>64</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 45.

While the relationship between prophet, priest and people is worth consideration, it will be important to keep before us the question of the relationship between prophet, king and people. We will also argue that the wonder tales within the Elisha stories do more than exalt that holy man.<sup>65</sup>

Presumably the next discussion in Eissfeldt's introduction focuses upon those narratives he classifies as saga. He does not say this explicitly but it appears his treatment moves along a literary spectrum from legend to history. He distinguishes the narratives of 4.8-37, 8.1-6 (giving and raising of the Shunammite's son); 5 (healing of Naaman) from the legends discussed immediately prior in that Elisha is here disassociated with prophetic disciples, having only Gehazi as an aide. Also these narratives differ in that Elisha now appears to dwell in Mt. Carmel (4.25). But, even within this classification, Eissfeldt separates the narrative of Naaman's healing from the Shunammite narrative based on the fact that in the former Elisha is involved with political events.

Finally Eissfeldt treats the historical narratives. Under this rubric he places the narratives of 2 Kgs 3.4-27 (the Moab campaign); 6.8-23 (the blinding of the Arameans); 6.24-7.19 (the siege of Samaria); along with 13.14-19 (Elisha's bow). Here Elisha is 'completely involved in higher political activity.'<sup>66</sup> The narratives which recall the revolts in 2 Kgs 8.7-15 and chapters 9-10 are in Eissfeldt's estimation the latter half of a story that finds its parallel in 1 Kgs 17.1-19.18. Apparently two attempts were made to associate with an important person the events that shook Israel in the ninth century BCE. In combining these stories, the beginning of the one associated with Elijah was placed first, while the conclusion of the one

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<sup>65</sup> The idea that the legendary stories exist to substantiate the prophet persists in recent treatments. See K. W. Whitelam, 'Elisha,' in *ABD* 2:472. J. M. Hadley, 'Elijah and Elisha,' *NIDOTTE* 4:477 claims these are 'basically collections of stories that prove that Elisha was as powerful a man of God as Elijah.' Interestingly, Hadley immediately notes Elisha's role as 'champion of Israel against foreign nations' but never questions why a prophet rather than a king is fulfilling this role.

<sup>66</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 295.

associated with Elisha followed. This was likely not the literary creation of the compiler of Kings. Rather it was 'more probably by the redactor of one of the works he used.'<sup>67</sup>

Eissfeldt abandoned Gunkel's more developmental approach to the forms, while applying his categories more loosely.<sup>68</sup> For example, Eissfeldt describes the hero saga, manifested in the prophet's 'part in the great political events of the day', in contrast to those narratives which reveal prophetic wonders performed among a small circle of disciples. The fluidity of his categories is then shown in his placement of narratives like 2 Kgs 5 midway between these groups.<sup>69</sup> He provides several examples of the variety of narrative strands that must be present. In 2 Kgs 5.27 Gehazi becomes a leper for the rest of his life, while 'this is clearly not presupposed in viii,1-6.'<sup>70</sup> He also points out that 6.8-23 cannot belong to the same context as 6.24-7.19, since in 6.23 we are told there were no further raiding parties into Israel, and yet in 6.24 Ben-hadad besieges Samaria.

Another OT introduction influenced by Gunkel's approach was that of A. Bentzen. In a lengthy discussion of oral tradition he emphasises the importance of priestly and prophetic circles responsible for the transmission of literature.<sup>71</sup> The Old Testament is not only oral, but is '*principally* oral, and has been handed down in different *circles* of men, each of these circles cultivating their particular forms of "literature."<sup>72</sup> Bentzen, in his discussion of narrative, allows for fluidity between types, and by appealing to the presence of mixed forms, claims that the distinction between historical narrative and poetical is artificial. On the other hand he appears to desire criteria that are more rigid than Eissfeldt's. Making his own contributions to

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<sup>67</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 292.

<sup>68</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 28.

<sup>69</sup> So Moore, *God Saves*, 24. See Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 46, 295.

<sup>70</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 295.

<sup>71</sup> A. Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1: 106-07. See Bentzen's discussion of oral tradition from pages 102-108. For his reliance upon Gunkel's program see page 14.

<sup>72</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:106.

the discussion, he is still dependent upon the classification of Gunkel and stands in debt to Eissfeldt.<sup>73</sup>

In discussing legend (Danish *sagn*) Bentzen distinguishes the one-episodic legend from the multi-episodic hero-legend.<sup>74</sup> He follows this with a treatment of a 'special type' of narrative, the Danish *legende*. That this category is separate from the ordinary legend (*sagn*) due only to the presence of sacred subjects in the former, is a common mistake that Bentzen wishes to correct. He points out that the ordinary legend (*sagn*) may also deal with sacred matters and thus concludes that we must base distinctions on formal, stylistic elements alone. He claims that this special form of 'legend' can be distinguished by its edificatory style and is therefore best characterised as 'devotional' or 'edificatory legend.' 'It makes propaganda for some religious opinion or form of life.'<sup>75</sup> This is something that the normal legend (*sagn*) never does.

As soon as we find 'tendency' in a 'legend' we may conclude that it has not come down to us in original form, but has been worked upon by later hands. Tendency never comes from original 'legends', but appears e.g. in the *cycles of traditions* formed by combination of originally individual legends.<sup>76</sup>

Bentzen's criterion is not any more helpful than the criterion of the presence or absence of the sacred, which he critiques. It is appropriate to question the ideology inherent in any narrative whether it has passed thorough later hands or not. Apart from the validity of this point, the criterion of 'tendency' is too vague to be of much

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<sup>73</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:233-34. Again we note the difficulty surrounding the terminology. For the German *Sage*, *Legende* and the Danish *sagn*, *legende* there is only the English word 'legend.' To overcome this Bentzen uses the English word 'legend' to translate the German/Danish (*Sage/sagn*) and adds the adjective 'devotional' or 'edificatory' to the English 'legend' to translate the German/Danish *Legende*, *legende*.

<sup>75</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:234.

<sup>76</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:234. See the critique by R. M. Hals, 'Legend: A Case Study in OT Form-Critical Terminology,' *CBQ* 34 (1972) 166-76. This essay is reproduced in G. W. Coats (ed.), *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable, Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, JSOTSup 35 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 45-55.

help in making a distinction between legend and devotional legend.<sup>77</sup> Further, Bentzen's specific treatment of the 'devotional legends' is unclear.

Bentzen argues that most 'devotional legends' are post-exilic although he considers a good portion of the Elisha stories to derive from the pre-exilic period. He posits several sub-classes of the devotional legend (*legende*): martyr legend, priest legend and prophet legend. The latter include the narratives of 2 Kgs 1-8, 13. These devotional legends are in fact a subset of the broader *hero-legend* (*sagn*) differentiated within the set by their religious emphasis. But here he obscures the genus he is attempting to elucidate. As was mentioned earlier, Bentzen (1:234) treated the hero-legend under the rubric of the legend (*sagn*) whereas here he discusses it as a broader category of devotional legend (*legende*). Contrary to Eissfeldt then, who treated the Elisha narratives as legends, saga and historical narrative, Bentzen appears to subordinate the devotional legend (*legende*) to the category legend (*sagn*). Presumably these devotional legends (of which the prophet legends are a type) grow from the stem of hero-legend. Thus we can attempt to clarify his taxonomy as we move from the trunk upwards: legend (*sagn*) = uni-episodic; hero-legend = (multi-episodic); devotional legend (*legende*) = (strong religious component); and finally prophetic legend in the upper canopy.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps again the confusion rests in the fact that 'the stories of *Elijah* and *Elisha* are of mixed character.'<sup>79</sup>

Again this discussion is not motivated by a need for form-critical precision but stems from a concern relevant to our study, seeing that the numerous branches among these 'devotional legends' are viewed as evidence for the lack of narrative coherence. Bentzen, for example, distinguishes the stories of 2 Kgs 8-9 from those of 2 Kgs 1.2-17; 2.23-25; 4.38-41; 6.1-7. The primary difference between the two is the

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<sup>77</sup> Hals, 'Legend,' 167.

<sup>78</sup> Bentzen, to make things really interesting, states (1:234) that the hero-legend is 'no special type formally.'

<sup>79</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:239.

proximity of the former to history while the latter adhere to a more popular class of miracle tales.<sup>80</sup>

This arrangement of different *types* of narratives is difficult. This is especially the case when the distinction between 'legend', 'fairy tale', and 'historical narrative' is established by criteria based upon the 'credibility' of the tale in question. *Hylmö* has rightly pointed out that in deciding the category of a narrative the 'credibility' is too vague as a criterion. It is better to start from *purely formal points of view*.<sup>81</sup>

Difficult indeed. Bentzen initially moves in his own direction in questioning the use of credibility as a criterion for distinguishing between legend and historical narrative, although later he appears to use the very criterion he earlier critiqued with respect to the Elisha narratives. Overall, Gunkel's basic classification scheme is still in use along with a greater emphasis on the role of oral tradition generally, and with respect to the prophetic legends in particular.<sup>82</sup> Bentzen differs from Eissfeldt in placing 'devotional legend' (*legende*) under the rubric of legend (*sagn*).

With regard to this last point, G. Fohrer follows Bentzen in his Old Testament introduction in treating *Legende* under the category of *Sage*. He points to the imprecise boundaries between the categories myth, fairy tale, saga, and legend. While some distinctions are possible in theory, in practice the 'boundaries are fluid.'<sup>83</sup> This is particularly so with regard to saga and legend 'because the latter is in fact only a special form of the former, referring to persons and places, periods and institutions, that are religiously significant or sacred.'<sup>84</sup> This raises the question of whether we can make any distinction between saga and legend seeing that Fohrer has categories such as sanctuary, cult, and tribal sagas - presumably items of some religious significance. Putting the question another way, if legend is manifested by

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<sup>80</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:239.

<sup>81</sup> Bentzen, *Introduction*, 1:233. See also page 232 where the same point is made contra Eissfeldt.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 26.

<sup>83</sup> G. Fohrer, *Introduction*, 87, points out that 'Israel obviously did not distinguish clearly between the different narrative forms.' I am here following D. Green's English translations: *Sage*=saga; *Legende*=legend.

<sup>84</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 86. This approximates the position of Eissfeldt.

its concern with religiously significant persons, places, or institutions, does saga then refer to religiously insignificant persons, places, or institutions?<sup>85</sup>

In his discussion of oral tradition Fohrer seeks to strike a balance between H. S. Nyberg who on the one hand, believed that most of the OT had an oral prehistory preserved and transmitted by 'circles or centres', and G. Widengren on the other, who was sceptical regarding the extent of oral tradition. Widengren believed texts were committed to writing at once and transmitted that way. According to Fohrer each of these positions, leaving no room for literary criticism, are too one sided. With Nyberg we may travel only as far as the post-exilic community which committed the oral tradition to writing and with Widengren we go nowhere since literary criticism is unnecessary.<sup>86</sup>

The evidence for oral tradition lies first in the observation that natives of the Near East have extensive memories.<sup>87</sup> Relying on Gunkel's work in Genesis, Fohrer points secondly to portions of the Old Testament like the Pentateuch that reflect a long tradition of storytelling.<sup>88</sup> The legends of Elijah and Elisha are singled out for their uniqueness in reflecting an oral tradition at a time in Israel's literary history when the presence of oral tradition was declining.

Although we encounter it occasionally at a later date, as in the legends concerning Elijah and Elisha, which at first were transmitted orally, from the time of Solomon on, as culture advanced, the importance of oral tradition continuously decreased.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> R. M. Hals, 'Legend,' 167.

<sup>86</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 37. Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 49 claims that recent folklore studies confirm Widengren's view it is not possible to establish a pre-literary form of the text and that the time of oral transmission is not long.

<sup>87</sup> On the topic of oral transmission and memory see R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), 53-57, 73-79; R. C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press and Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), 1-31. Culley treats a number of shorter tales within the Elisha narratives; Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 69-71.

<sup>88</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 40.

It appears that the Elijah / Elisha narratives are something of an anomaly. Fohrer is close to Gunkel's assertion that 'later times were no longer satisfied with the very brief stories of primitive construction; a more fully developed aesthetic faculty demands more scope for its expression. Thus greater compositions arose.'<sup>90</sup> Likewise Fohrer's discussion of the Elisha narratives is not appreciably different from the introductions we have already looked at. He observes several narrative strands the first of which is a 'narrative cycle of popular miracle stories, linked together by being related to Gilgal.'<sup>91</sup> These formerly independent 'anecdotes' reflect either real deeds of power done by the prophet or make application of common motifs.<sup>92</sup> His second strand of tradition viewed broadly, is 'rather like historical narrative'. Careful observation however, reveals in Fohrer's treatment the more usual elements of miracle story, legend, or saga. These narratives have in common their view of the political and historical role played by Elisha. Fohrer differentiates between those narratives in which the prophet is hostile to the ruling class, as represented by Joram (2 Kgs 3.4-27; 8.7-15), and those which derive from the period of Jehu's revolution in which Elisha is on friendly terms with the ruling class (2 Kgs 5; 6.8-23; 6.24-7.20; 13.14-19).<sup>93</sup>

Although our survey of scholarly opinion on the Elisha narratives is far from exhaustive, we are perhaps now in some position to summarise. Broadly speaking the narratives are categorised as legend, historical narrative or some admixture. These distinctions are made based on the whether a narrative emphasises miracle / hagiology preserved by prophetic circles, or conversely whether it possesses some

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<sup>90</sup> Gunkel, *Legends*, 47 (German, xxi) One wonders what the great OT scholar would say of our own 'sound-bite' age in view of his statement that 'primitive times were satisfied with quite brief productions not much over half an hour. Then when the narrative is finished the imagination of the hearer is satisfied and his attention exhausted.'

<sup>91</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 234.

<sup>92</sup> Fohrer does not say what these motifs are. We can only assume he refers to the fairy tale motifs mentioned on page 89 where he explicitly mentions Elijah's mantle (2 Kgs 2.8) and the never empty meal jar and oil cruse in 4:1-7.

<sup>93</sup> Fohrer, *Introduction*, 234.

history-like elements usually with some connection to political events. There is a somewhat fluid application of Gunkel's classifications and the appeal to oral tradition is upheld for the creation of at least a portion of these narratives.

A. Rofé provided a fresh attempt at classification, cataloguing the areas where Gunkel's form critical criteria had fallen short in treating the prophetic narratives.<sup>94</sup> While form criticism traced the literary types back to a prior oral and presumably shorter stage, most of the prophetic stories are longer narratives and thus do not promote such a treatment. Form criticism's success in establishing the *Sitz im Leben* of a variety of literary types had not been duplicated in the prophetic narratives since 'very little can be said about such a situation besides the obvious statement that most of the stories were created and transmitted by circles of prophetic disciples.'<sup>95</sup> Rofé pointed out that the stereotyped locutions recovered in the reconstructed *Sitz im Leben* of other literary types were lacking in the prophetic stories. This led Rofé to conclude that content is the only possible criterion by which to classify these narratives.

Rofé begins with a category he calls *simple legenda*.<sup>96</sup> Under this heading he places 2 Kgs 2.19-22; 2.23-25; 4.1-7; 4.38-41, 42-44; 6.1-7; and 13.20-21.<sup>97</sup> These

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<sup>94</sup> A. Rofé, 'The Classification of the Prophetic Stories,' *JBL* 89 (1970) 427-29; id., 'Classes in the Prophetic Stories: Didactic Legends and Parables,' in *Studies on Prophecy*, VTSup 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 143-64; id., *The Prophetic Stories: the Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988).

<sup>95</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 427. We question whether this is so obvious.

<sup>96</sup> In the following discussion we continue Rofé's use of *simple legenda* even although it mixes English and Latin.

<sup>97</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 430. There are, of course, other ways of examining these stories particularly with respect to their magical elements. See R. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 58-61. A significant number of Carroll's examples come from the northern prophetic narratives and within the Elisha stories he notes in particular: 2 Kgs 2.19-22; 2.23-24; 4.1-7, 38-41, 42-44; 2 Kgs 5.11 (curing leprosy with the wave of a hand), 5.27 (transferring leprosy); 6.1-7; 6.8-23 (striking an army with blindness); 13.20-21. Sometimes the magic power of the prophet was transformed so that the act was achieved by YHWH's word or will (p.59). According to Carroll this transformation process, while perhaps more apparent than real, moved 'the primitive magic of early prophecy into an account of the rational activity of the prophet as spokesman of Yahweh' (p.59). On the subject of

are tales characterised by a single miracle and its immediate circumstances. Along with this he notes the complete lack of moral character, apart from the statement in 2 Kgs 4.1. 'These characteristics in the tales betray their popular origin. Implied also is a popular method of transmission: oral tradition.'<sup>98</sup> From this initial type developed the literary elaboration of the *legenda*. It is the increased length and fully developed plot that marks the major difference between this class and the earlier *simple legenda*.<sup>99</sup> Mutations of the *legenda* led to the development of the *vita* which are characterised by an attempt to answer questions concerning the beginning and end of the holy man's life.<sup>100</sup>

From the *simple legenda* which have their basis in oral tradition, develop *legenda* and *vita*. The establishment of historical links between types does not reflect the evolutionary tendencies that hindered Gunkel's approach but does reveal an interest in the history of type, which according to Rofé, 'betrays to the reader my indebtedness to the form-critical method, in spite of rejection of its tools in this specific area of biblical literature.'<sup>101</sup> Rofé concludes that any further work on the classification of the non-oral material in the prophetic narratives must proceed not in

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Elisha and magic see A. Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in ancient Palestine and Syria*, SHCANE 8 (Leiden/New York/and Köln: Brill, 1996); F. H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment. A Socio-Historical Investigation*, JSOTSup 142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Bob Becking, *Een Magisch Ritueel in Jahwistisch Perspectief. Literaire Structuur en Godsdienst-Historische Achtergronden van 2 Koningen 4:31-38*, UTR 17 (Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1992) and for a related treatment in English id., "'Touch for Health...'" Magic in II Reg 4,31-37 with a Remark on the History of Yahwism,' *ZAW* 108 (1996) 34-54; T. W. Overholt, *Cultural Anthropology*, 24-68; id., 'Seeing is Believing: the Social Setting of Prophetic Acts of Power,' *JSOT* 23 (1982) 3-31; E. Wendland, 'Elijah and Elisha: Sorcerers or Witch Doctors?,' *BT* 43 (1992) 213-23; J. Lust, 'On Wizards and Prophets,' in *Studies on Prophecy*, VTSup 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 133-42; G. Fohrer, 'Prophetie und Magie' in *Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie, (1949-1965)*, BZAW 99 (Berlin: A. Töpelman, 1967), 242-64.

<sup>98</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 432

<sup>99</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 433.

<sup>100</sup> Rofé 'Classification,' 435-436. This biographical drive is what leads disciples of the holy man to collect the *legenda* into 'one inclusive legendary biography' several generations after his death (p.436).

<sup>101</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 428.

accordance with form-critical lines but must trace back the 'creative activity which expanded the original form of a folk tale.'<sup>102</sup>

Again the concern here is not to disparage form-critical method, but rather to point out how application of Gunkel's categories and the assumption of oral tradition preclude a wider ranging perspective on the narratives. In his concluding comments Rofé claims that classification is only valid insofar as it helps us to acquire the message of a book. 'Full realization of what that message is can only be attained only by attentive and perceptive examination of the single piece of art.'<sup>103</sup> It is this kind of attention to the Elisha narrative as a 'single piece of art' which is missing from recent scholarly treatments. While Moore's recent work on 2 Kings 5-7 underscored the literary-aesthetic perspective, he still dealt with the stories 'in their independent integrity rather than with their current disposition within the so called Deuteronomistic History.'<sup>104</sup> This leaves unanswered the relation of 2 Kings 2-4, and 8 to 2 Kings 5-7.<sup>105</sup>

### Classification and Oral Tradition

Before turning to the question of narrative coherence and deuteronomistic (dis)integration we will first look at several studies that call into question the classification of the Elisha narratives as 'legend' and the related notion of oral tradition. R. M. Hals explores the inadequacy of the treatments of 'legend' found in the introductions of Eissfeldt, Bentzen, and Fohrer as well as the ubiquitous concern

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<sup>102</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 440.

<sup>103</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 440.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 12. While Moore focuses upon a pre-deuteronomistic compositional level, he recognises that the prophetic stories underwent later editorial changes. Still he maintains that 'the prior form of the respective stories has not been obfuscated.'

<sup>105</sup> The recent appearance of W. Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism*, JSOTSup 286 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) and T. L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000) provides some evidence of a movement toward a broader treatment of the stories.

for a proper translation of the terms *Sage* and *Legende*.<sup>106</sup> Relying upon the work of A. Jolles<sup>107</sup> he concludes that the chief characteristic of legend (*Legende*) is located in that which calls the reader to imitation. In the legends of the saints, the saints' virtues are to be mimicked. The problem then of applying the term *Legende* to the Elijah and Elisha narratives is that the reader is not called upon to 'go and do likewise' as regards their prophetic activity. He concludes, 'In spite of some difficulties it seems to me best to abide with the label prophet story and to reject the designation prophet legend as misleading for the reasons I have given.'<sup>108</sup>

J. Scullion in his inspection of *Märchen*, *Sage*, and *Legende* does his part to move Old Testament scholarship out of the 'labyrinth to which they have made no small contribution.'<sup>109</sup> From its inception legend (*Legende*) embraced a typically Christian concept in which the life of the holy person was to be read by the faith community. Scullion, like Hals, affirms the centrality of imitation in the *Legende*. Preferring to label nearly all biblical narrative as *Sage*, Scullion concludes that scholars should not apply the term legend to biblical narratives 'because of the meaning and associations of this already well-established hagiographical form.'<sup>110</sup>

Along with the questioning of *Legende* as a narrative classification we also find scholars debating the viability of oral composition and transmission. This is addressed in a recent study by P. Kirkpatrick who investigates the major influence played by folklore studies upon the Old Testament.<sup>111</sup>

She first confirms that Gunkel and A. Olrik<sup>112</sup> arrived at similar conclusions with regard to the criteria by which oral composition and transmission can be recognised

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<sup>106</sup> Hals, 'Legend,' 167-169.

<sup>107</sup> A. Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1958), 23-61.

<sup>108</sup> Hals, 'Legend,' 176.

<sup>109</sup> J. Scullion, 'Märchen, Sage, Legende: Towards a Clarification of Some Literary Terms Used By Old Testament Scholars,' *VT* 34 (1984) 321-336 (336).

<sup>110</sup> Scullion, 'Märchen,' 336.

<sup>111</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*.

<sup>112</sup> A. Olrik, 'Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung,' *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum* 51 (1909) 1-12.

from written.<sup>113</sup> Based on evidence culled from folklorists she argues that these criteria are untenable. Primarily this is due to the fact that Olrik established his laws using material that had itself undergone editing in the transcription process. The stories which Olrik used had themselves been reduced to a fundamental core. His method, and thus his laws fail, being based as they were on flawed texts.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, folklorists examining Olrik's laws find that they apply equally to written or oral narratives. 'The implication for biblical studies is clear, for it should consequently affect our acceptance of many of Gunkel's conclusions (themselves similar to those of Olrik) about the nature and form of oral composition.'<sup>115</sup>

Kirkpatrick's work returns us to Rofé's starting point. He claims that we are mistaken if we think that the present form of the *simple legenda* is the original oral form. The Israelite storyteller was no primitive, unable to master his language, nor were the Israelite public such simpletons that they could not tolerate a story that lasted for longer than one minute.

The oral stage must have been longer, much longer, than the version we have now in scripture. The conciseness of the present stories rather reveals the opposite: the man who reduced these narratives to writing took the pains, and had the skill, to condense them. He gave to the reader the kernel of the story only; recording the mere miracle and its immediate circumstances, he shaped what we can define as the *simplest, most pure, written legenda*.<sup>116</sup>

Kirkpatrick's study seems applicable here. Olrik's laws for discerning oral genres were based on material that had undergone change in both content and form. Can the same not be said for Rofé's classification of *simple legenda* and his assertion that the characteristics of these tales betray their oral tradition? The committing of these tales to writing immediately limits our ability to say with precision anything about their prior oral nature. If this is so perhaps a broader examination of these stories is justified. As Kirkpatrick notes:

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<sup>113</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 56.

<sup>115</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 57.

<sup>116</sup> Rofé, 'Classification,' 432-33.

It would seem, therefore, that no general rules of oral transmission can be promulgated. Furthermore, once given a written text it is almost impossible to ascertain with any exactitude which traditions were and which were not transmitted orally.<sup>117</sup>

Rofé is not claiming to produce a study of literary coherence and how individual elements relate to one another.<sup>118</sup> However, his statement does raise both the issues of coherence and the competence of the biblical writer(s)/redactor(s) to which we will return below. For the present and in view of the above discussion, we may examine historical narrative, the other category most often applied to the Elisha narratives.

In order to proceed we must keep several concepts before us. First, the summons to abandon the application of the term legend (*Legende*) was linked with a call to conceive of these narratives as *Sage*. Perhaps Bentzen and Fohrer, in setting softer boundaries, foresaw such a need in treating (*Legende*) under the category (*Sage*). The looseness of these categories was already noted formerly by Gunkel.<sup>119</sup> Second, given a written text it is nearly impossible to discern which traditions were and which were not transmitted orally. Third, classifying biblical narrative with genres like myth, legend, folktale, or historical narrative is a largely subjective process, dependent as it

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<sup>117</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 71. This is not the same as saying there is no oral tradition underlying the biblical narratives. We must be careful to maintain a balanced view of the interplay and complexity between oral and literary narratives in ancient Israel. Any notion of an oral period in Israel's history followed by a literary one is to be rejected. S. Niditch states: 'Given this assessment of Israelite aesthetics and the importance placed on the ongoing oral-literate continuum, source-critical theories become suspect' [S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 134]. It must be noted that Niditch provides her own hypothetical models (pp. 119-30). T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books*, The Biblical Seminar 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 131: 'When stories that originated in oral folklore (in which every performance was in any case a new and different creation) are transposed into the literary medium, they inevitably undergo a transformation.' On the issue of oral performance and the difficulty of differentiating oral and written literature see the important work of R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977).

<sup>118</sup> However see Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 49. Here he argues that the Elisha cycle is an attempt to construct a *vita* of the Holy Man from particular *legenda*. Rofé is one of the few scholars to attempt an explanation for the current arrangement of the Elisha narratives. We will return to his treatment in Chapter 2.

<sup>119</sup> See Moore, *God Saves*, 33.

is on the cultural perception of the original audience.<sup>120</sup> Fourth, the so-called Elijah and Elisha cycles (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13) are dominant from the perspective of the narrative space allotted to them in Kings as well as their position in the middle of a book with a strong historiographic emphasis.<sup>121</sup>

Finally we return to Kirkpatrick and our query of historical narrative as a classification. To investigate the question of the relationship between *Sage* and history she again turns to the field studies of folklorists who have explored oral tradition as a source of valuable historical information. She argues that it is very difficult to distinguish legend [*Sage*] from historical writing given that they cannot be distinguished based on form, content, or the concerns they represent. 'If legend can be used to convey historical events, and historical events can contain legendary material, how are the two to be differentiated?'<sup>122</sup> Among her conclusions she states:

Just as written records seek to legitimize the present ruling political or religious authorities, so do oral accounts. Distinctions between what have been considered as older oral genres and history writing cannot therefore be made. History writing inevitably includes written forms of oral genres such as legend and folktale. It does not necessarily reflect a more sophisticated and complex way of viewing the world. Oral histories can equally be as complex and sophisticated in the way they seek to manipulate the events of the past.<sup>123</sup>

The questionable validity of *Legende* as a narrative category, the difficulty of discerning which traditions were and which were not transmitted orally, the subjective nature of genre identification, the placement of prophetic folklore within a

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<sup>120</sup> Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 260; Kirkpatrick, *Folklore Study*, 113. There is of course the question of whether Israel made such distinctions in the first place. Fohrer, *Introduction*, 87 claims they did not. Gunkel seems to hold a similar position: Gunkel, *Folktale*, 23. But see Gunkel, *Legends*, 10 (German, v): 'In a word, the distinction between legend and history is not injected into the Old Testament, but is to be found by any attentive reader already present in the Old Testament.' Several recent studies reflect a return to more general classifications [so B. O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to Historical Literature*, FOTL 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984)] or no classifications beyond the very general 'story' [so T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WBC 13 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 45-6].

<sup>121</sup> See R. D. Nelson, 'The Anatomy of the Book of Kings,' *JSOT* 40 (1988) 39-48 (39); G. Savran, '1 and 2 Kings,' in R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 148-64 (149). The Elijah/Elisha narratives span 19 out of 47 chapters of the book of Kings or approximately 40%.

<sup>122</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore Study*, 106.

<sup>123</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Folklore*, 111.

book manifesting an apparent historiographic impulse, and the porous borders of the *Sage* / historical narrative differentiation, all point to the need for a re-evaluation of coherence in the Elisha narrative of 2 Kings. It is clear that one's view of the composition and transmission of these stories is closely related to genre decisions. The concern for the present study is neither a denial that some of the material in this narrative may have been transmitted orally, nor of the existence of oral forms of folktale, legend, myth, or historical narrative now given a written form. Rather, the question of concern is whether the perceived variety within the Elisha narratives - viewed as a patchwork of genres and traditions - has short-circuited interrogation of viable narrative relationships both among these 'prophetic legends', and more remotely, to those portions which are deemed part of the DtrH.

### *Exploring Coherence and Elisha's Art*

In the quotation which heads this chapter Jones succinctly raises the issues observed in our examination of the modern study of the Elisha narrative to this point. The analysis of the content and form of the narratives, and the struggle to identify the varying traditions all indicate, in his estimation, a disjointed text. His is not the only treatment to affirm the failure of the author(s)/editor(s) of Kings to create a unified portrait from the disparate sources in the Elisha narratives. Several examples below will suffice to give us a sense of this perspective. G. W. Anderson writes that 'the stories about Elijah have more coherence than those about Elisha, which are linked together by little more than the personality of the prophet.'<sup>124</sup> Some assessments maintain an elevated view of the author's artistic ability; while others see the Elisha narrative as wanting from a literary standpoint. For example, A. F. Campbell notes the 'capacity for literary creativity and genius' along with evidence of great skill in storytelling and 'deep perception and remarkable intelligence in the use of narrative

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<sup>124</sup> G. W. Anderson, *Introduction*, 87.

material.’<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, Y. T. Radday states that the Elisha cycle lacks ‘literary or dramatic power’, reveals a lack of ‘inner unity’, and is ‘incompatible with the rest of the book, if not the rest of Scripture.’<sup>126</sup> In comparison to the Elijah episodes the Elisha story is ‘very fragmentary, quite lacking in the unity and purpose of the earlier story [Elijah], and sounds more like a collection of short anecdotes than a connected narrative.’<sup>127</sup>

Recently, W. J. Bergen observes that one of the bases for source criticism of the Elisha narratives is the presence of numerous fissures within the text.<sup>128</sup> He goes on to argue that these divisions are not units representing varying traditions but instead are evidence of the ‘ideological tremors which resonate through DtrH.’<sup>129</sup> Thus in Bergen’s reading, the Elisha narratives become something of a fault line in the plate tectonics of the shifting texts. Bergen’s comments are worth noting more fully:

Any reader of the Elisha narrative will find that coherence is elusive in 2 Kings. If coherence remains outside the grasp of the reader, we may assume that it remained outside the grasp of the writer(s) as well--and this despite efforts to achieve it. This being the case, it makes the most sense to argue that the a-coherence (not incoherence, which suggests weak writing skills) reflects the inadequacy of their ideology. That is, we are dealing not with one ideology versus another, but rather with a single ideology failing to provide the completeness it claims for itself. Up to this point in DtrH, history has been moving along rather smoothly. The coming of Elisha proves the veneer of coherence cannot hide the basic flaws underneath.<sup>130</sup>

Bergen’s underlying assumption may be questioned. Because the reader finds coherence ‘elusive’ does not require the assumption that the writer did as well.<sup>131</sup> Bergen does not want to use the term ‘incoherence’ because it suggests ‘weak

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<sup>125</sup> Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 108.

<sup>126</sup> Y. T. Radday, ‘Chiasm in Kings,’ *LB* 31 (1974) 52-67 (63-63).

<sup>127</sup> B. P. Church, *The Israel Saga* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 278-79 cited in A. Preminger and E. L. Greenstein (eds. and compilers), *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism* (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1986), 358-59.

<sup>128</sup> W. J. Bergen, ‘The Prophetic Alternative: Elisha and the Israelite Monarchy,’ in R. B. Coote (ed.), *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 127-137.

<sup>129</sup> Bergen, ‘Alternative,’ 129.

<sup>130</sup> Bergen, ‘Alternative,’ 129.

<sup>131</sup> It may be fair to ask how we know that the writer desired to achieve coherence in the first place.

writing skills' and yet his writer(s) could not achieve coherence even though the attempt was made.

His comments raise numerous questions. Do some texts require of the reader more effort than others with respect to coherence? What kind of coherence is envisaged (theological, historical, literary)? It is interesting that Bergen's reader, unable to discern coherence, is still able to observe a 'single ideology'. But if the reader is having difficulty discerning coherence how will he or she determine a single ideology? If it is difficult to make sense of the text I am reading, am I on more stable ground by appealing to an underlying ideology as the primary explanation of the phenomena in the text? Where does this ideology come from? Do writers or readers create coherence? Is the failure to discern coherence the fault of the text, the writer, the reader or some combination? Lacking from discussions of coherence or incoherence in the Elisha narrative is the question of what makes a narrative coherent in the first place. More specifically what is the nature of coherence? This will be the focus of chapter 2.

### *The (Dis)integrated Elisha*

The traits of the Elisha stories in 2 Kings are well known. They depict a wonder-working prophet often referred to as 'the man of God', who is closely linked with the 'sons of the prophets'. While Gehazi, Elisha's servant, is often named, the king of Israel is usually not. Elisha is frequently on friendly terms with this king, although not consistently. Similarly, the narratives usually reflect a state of warfare between Aram and Israel, but again not consistently.<sup>132</sup> In spite of this literary diversity 'most scholars agree that the stories form part of a collection about Elisha that was incorporated into the book of Kings at some point.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 95.

<sup>133</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 95.

In spite of the recent emphasis on narrative in biblical studies, Kings generally and Elisha in particular, have not fared so well. R. Wilson notes that the study of Kings is actually 'running counter' to research on the rest of the Former Prophets. While many studies move towards readings that emphasise 'literary or theological integrity, students of Kings are moving increasingly away from the notion that the book can be approached as a single literary unit.'<sup>134</sup> This assessment is supported by C. Exum who observes: 'The under-representation of 2 Kings in this collection reflects its under-representation in any extended way in *JSOT*.'<sup>135</sup>

Another way of assessing the literary 'fit' of the Elisha narrative is by examining the treatment of the stories from the standpoint of deuteronomistic composition. Van Seters claims that the stories are only a 'loose collection' linked by Elisha's travels<sup>136</sup> and yet even when they are self-referential, as when 2 Kings 8.1-6 reflects back to the earlier story of 4.8-37, this is not considered evidence for coherence being an 'artificial creation to give a sense of unity, which the collection otherwise lacks.'<sup>137</sup> According to Van Seters, the Elisha narratives are not integrated into the DtrH for a number of reasons: they show no signs of deuteronomistic editing; the king of Israel remains anonymous; the canonical placement during the reign of Jehoram (a son of Ahab) seems incongruous with the fact that the prophet 'seems to be on fairly cordial

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<sup>134</sup> R. R. Wilson 'The Former Prophets: Reading the Books of Kings,' in J. L. Mays, D. L. Petersen, and K. H. Richard (eds.), *Old Testament Interpretation Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honour of Gene M. Tucker* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 83-112 (84-85). Commentators have responded recently by giving a more prominent role to literary-aesthetic concerns. See Hobbs, *2 Kings*; R. D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1987); B. O. Long, *2 Kings*, FOTL 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); I. W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, NIBC 7 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), T. E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companions (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), and most recently R. L. Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, A Michael Glazier Book, 2000).

<sup>135</sup> C. Exum (ed.), *The Historical Books: A Sheffield Reader*, The Biblical Seminar 40 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>136</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 305. See pages 305-306 for Van Seters' discussion.

<sup>137</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 305.

terms with him'; and there is little concern with Canaanite cults or an 'aversion for the house of Ahab' as is found in the Elijah narratives.<sup>138</sup>

S. L. McKenzie in large part holds a similar position. He sees most of the long prophetic narratives spanning 1 Kings 13-2 Kings 13 as post-Dtr insertions.<sup>139</sup> This position contrasts with most scholars who, under Noth's influence, assume that the Elisha stories were part of the DtrH.<sup>140</sup> While the lack of integration of the Elisha narratives (2 Kings 2; 3.4-27; 4.1-8.15; 13.14-21) says nothing of the age of the compositions themselves, 'the evidence that he [Dtr] did not include them is compelling.'<sup>141</sup> Like Van Seters his first reason for such a strong position is the lack of Dtr editing of these stories. This stands in stark contrast to the highly edited Jehu narrative in 2 Kings 9-10.<sup>142</sup> Secondly, like R. Nelson, McKenzie points out that the Elisha narratives of 2 Kings 2 and 13.14-21 stand outside of the chronological framework.<sup>143</sup> If they are outside of his framework then they were not edited by Dtr. Thus, while Nelson interprets this chronological interruption as a literary device, McKenzie views it as evidence that these narratives were never part of the original DtrH.<sup>144</sup> He explicitly disagrees with Van Seters' claim that 3.4-27 was a part of the original DtrH since it contains no deuteronomistic language and, like 2 Kgs 2 and 13.14-21, it is outside of the chronological rubric.<sup>145</sup> Finally, while McKenzie views

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<sup>138</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 305-306. This contrasts with 2 Kgs 3 and 2 Kgs 9-10 as well as the Elijah stories in 1 Kgs 17, 19, 21 and 2 Kgs 1 which are integrated according to Van Seters.

<sup>139</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 98. See pages 95-100 for McKenzie's discussion and conclusion on prophetic additions to the book of Kings. Pages 151-52 provide a list of McKenzie's analysis of the original DtrH and post-deuteronomistic additions.

<sup>140</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 95.

<sup>141</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 97.

<sup>142</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 97. See McKenzie's full treatment of 2 Kings 9-10 on pages 70-80. Any references that link Jehu's revolt with the fulfilment of 1 Kings 21 are by default secondary additions.

<sup>143</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 97; Nelson, *Kings*, 158; F. J. M. Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah in the Period of the Prophetic Actions against the Baal Policy of the House of Ahab (I Kings 16,29 - II Kings 11,20)* Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Pontificio Instituto Biblico (Apeldoorn: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 12.

<sup>144</sup> We shall take up Nelson's treatment below.

<sup>145</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 97. McKenzie relies upon the work of J. D. Shenkel, *Chronology and Recensional Development in the Greek Text of Kings*, HSM 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). The insertion of the Elisha narratives has led to confused chronology in the MT. For a

almost all of the prophetic narratives from 1 Kgs 13-2 Kgs 13 as post-Dtr additions, the interdependence of the Elijah and Elisha stories suggests that they were introduced into the history as a group.<sup>146</sup>

The scholarly discussion here is reminiscent of the treatment given by source critics of the Pentateuch. The very portions of the narratives which provide explicit literary connections are excised as evidence of late redactional activity. Having removed the evidence for coherence scholars return to the data to reconstruct what remains. McKenzie recognises this danger and understands that source critical methods have prompted a reaction - and return - to Noth's view of single authorship and unity of the DtrH. He believes that Noth's model, while requiring further testing and revision remains the most useful theory of composition.

The area for such testing should be the book of Kings. The scholarly debate over composition and related issues has converged on the book of Kings because it raises the most difficulties, literary critical and ideological, for the understanding of a unified DH.<sup>147</sup>

However, it is possible that the question of deuteronomistic integration is a red herring as far as coherence is concerned. What for example is gained by arguing for the non-integration of these stories into the framework of a supposed Dtr whose very existence is questioned? Wilson for example has examined the criteria used to determine whether a literary layer can be labelled prophetic. He concludes that neither vocabulary, speech forms, theology / ideology, nor the fact that the sources deal with prophets, are adequate criteria for considering a layer prophetic. There are in fact 'no firm criteria' in his estimation.<sup>148</sup> If he is right then what criteria should be used in assessing whether these narratives are post-deuteronomistic additions? The answer put forward by Van Seters and McKenzie is that they have not been

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recent critique of Shenkel's proposal see G. Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah*, SHCANE 9 (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1996) especially chapter 8, 'The Chronological Data in the Greek Text of the Book of Kings,' 127-44.

<sup>146</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 99 n.24.

<sup>147</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 19. McKenzie uses DH for 'Deuteronomistic History.'

<sup>148</sup> Wilson, 'The Former Prophets,' 89.

integrated. They do not show signs of deuteronomistic editing and several of the stories are outside the chronological framework.

But does this not beg the question? Regarding the DtrH, McKenzie states that Dtr's 'influence on it is pervasive, in the selection and use of written sources and in creating narratives without them.'<sup>149</sup> He also agrees with Van Seters 'that the line drawn by scholars between Dtr's sources and Dtr's own narrative is often artificial and always difficult to defend.'<sup>150</sup> In view of such statements it is not clear how one is to distinguish an expansive gloss from deuteronomistic editing, or deuteronomistic editing from a post-deuteronomistic addition. Clearly this is an area that requires more study. McKenzie is concerned that scholars have not adequately handled the problem of the northern prophetic narratives.<sup>151</sup> But do these narratives fare any better in his treatment? The 'trouble with kings' actually appears to be the prophets generally and Elisha in particular. The subject of Elisha's place within Kings still remains, and it is to that subject that we now turn.

### *Putting Elisha in his Place*

According to G. Savran, Kings has a similar ideology to the other Former Prophets and yet with a fundamental difference in style due to its lack of a primary figure like Joshua or major protagonists like David and Saul.<sup>152</sup> There is a chiastic structure based on thematic emphases within the work. The peak of this chiastic structure covers the material from 1 Kings 16.23-2 Kings 12, comprising a textual expanse totally out of proportion to the amount of time it narrates. The midpoint of

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<sup>149</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 147.

<sup>150</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 147.

<sup>151</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*. On page 7 Cross is criticised for not explaining the presence of these narratives. On page 10 Lohfink and Provan similarly 'fail to explain' the presence of these northern prophetic stories.

<sup>152</sup> Savran, '1 and 2 Kings,' 147.

this major section is found at 2 Kings 2 being the only place in the Old Testament where the mantle of prophecy is transferred.<sup>153</sup>

It is curious that while Savran argues for the importance of these prophetic narratives within the larger structure of Kings, in his actual treatment he considers them only as they relate to the twin themes of prophecy and fulfilment, and the power struggle between the prophetic office and the monarchy.<sup>154</sup> Certainly the themes of prophecy and fulfilment are well recognised and the uniqueness of 2 Kings 2 bears further examination. There are also other structural observations that encourage further questioning of the role that these prophetic narratives play in Kings.

For example, R. Nelson using a computer metaphor, discusses how a temporal point of view can aid us in understanding the force of the entire narrative. The opening and closing of the 'files' of various kings reveals an 'organizing system' with a 'temporal sophistication' that often goes unnoticed.<sup>155</sup>

A file can be left open so that the narrator can put a brake on the rush of chronological time and report at leisure on illustrative or paradigmatic items, then let the carrier wave of opening and closing files rapidly cover the chronological distance to the next point of reflective pause.<sup>156</sup>

Nelson observes that the narrative interplay between the kingdoms unites the stories of Judah and Israel and makes it difficult for the reader to separate the story of one kingdom from the other.<sup>157</sup> This 'entanglement' of the kingdoms plays an important role in the Elisha narratives. Nelson notes a gap in this 'file structure' at the

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<sup>153</sup> Savran, '1 and 2 Kings,' 149. Others have found Savran's outline useful: See J. T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, A Michael Glazier Book, 1996), 373; S. W. Holloway, 'Kings, Book of 1-2,' *ABD* 4:70-83 (76). Maeijer, *Second Elijah*, 1-2 likewise notes the discrepancy between narrative time and narrative space. Radday, 'Chiasm in Kings,' 52-67 sees a central portion running from the kingdom division in 1 Kgs 12 to the fall of Samaria in 2 Kgs 17.

<sup>154</sup> Savran, '1 and 2 Kings,' 162-163.

<sup>155</sup> Nelson, 'Anatomy,' 44; Long, *1 Kings*, 26-27 for what he calls 'pausal moments'. See also Marie-Laure Ryan, 'On the Window Structure of Narrative Discourse,' *Semiotica* 64 (1987) 59-81.

<sup>156</sup> Nelson, 'Anatomy,' 44.

<sup>157</sup> Nelson, 'Anatomy,' 44.

ascension of Elijah which is told after Ahaziah's file has closed and before Jehoram of Israel's is opened (3.1-3). In this way Elijah's transport and Elisha's succession is emphasised and takes on an other-worldly sense 'in a sort of mythic time outside the run of ordinary time, all to good literary effect.'<sup>158</sup> Bergen, likewise points to Elisha as a disrupter of time. He notes the overwhelming confusion over the names of the kings of Judah and Israel in this section of the narrative. 'Whether or not this confusion is intentional, the text leaves us with a powerful though subtle message about the importance of kings, and the way YHWH acts in history.'<sup>159</sup>

We are still left with the question of Elisha's place in the narrative sweep of Kings and the Former Prophets. R. Wilson, desiring to redress an imbalance in approaches that deny the prophetic element, asks whether the 'Former Prophets' is not actually about prophets. He claims that 'it is becoming increasingly clear that the role of prophecy in Kings must be reassessed.'<sup>160</sup> In doing this he makes a marked distinction between the northern prophetic material, with its emphasis on the prophecy-fulfilment motif, and the southern material dealing only with Judah. 'Although the stories of the northern prophetic activity occupy a great deal of space, the book of Kings in its present form is ultimately the story of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile.'<sup>161</sup> He concludes that the political alliances of the Judean kings are a key theme in the book as it relates to the 'Judean narratives.'<sup>162</sup> Thus it is from this southern material - evincing little interest in prophecy - that we obtain a better grasp on the themes the authors wished to emphasise.

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<sup>158</sup> Nelson, 'Anatomy,' 44.

<sup>159</sup> Bergen, 'The Prophetic Alternative,' 135; Recently the observation, that the first and last narratives concerning Elisha interrupt the normal flow of the book of Kings, is made from a historical rather than literary perspective in G. Galil, *Chronology*, 143 n.46. The issue of anonymity and confused identity will be explored in our textual treatment below.

<sup>160</sup> Wilson, 'The Former Prophets,' 87. Wilson singles out the work of Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*. He claims that Campbell is moving against a critical current that minimizes the importance of prophecy in Kings. However, we have already seen that Campbell's 'Prophetic Record' had no place for Elisha.

<sup>161</sup> Wilson, 'The Former Prophets,' 90.

<sup>162</sup> Wilson, 'The Former Prophets,' 91-93.

There is little doubt that the recognition of the important role of political alliances enhances our reading of Kings. But isn't this de-emphasis of the prophetic material the very thing Wilson desires to reassess? Is Kings ultimately a story of the fall and exile of Judah alone, or are fall and exile symptomatic of larger concerns? Why draw attention to stories about northern prophets by placing them in the middle of a book that is finally about the fall of Jerusalem and exile? T. Collins observes that the organisation and literary structure of northern prophetic narratives (1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13) 'carries much of the weight of the theological views of the writer responsible for shaping them.'<sup>163</sup>

It is no easy task to precipitate the south from the north. This is nowhere clearer than in the Elisha narratives where Kings of Judah and Israel acquire similar names, where outsiders like Namaan become insiders, and insiders like Gehazi become outsiders, and where Kings of Judah and Israel intermarry and make political alliances. It is with Jehoshaphat that the peace with Ahab (1 Kings 22.44) is made explicit; and as the Kings narrative progresses it takes an increasing interest in these alliances. But this theme is not usually attributed to the Deuteronomists and leads Wilson to question if in fact Kings was part of the DtrH.<sup>164</sup> J. G. McConville also notes the importance of the unity between Judah and Israel. By most scholarly accounts the reader is unprepared for the hammer that falls upon Judah after the positive commendations given to the reforming kings Hezekiah, and especially Josiah. But in fact this hammer is only the final result of a loss of identity foretold well in advance through the use of irony and 'ominous detail.'

Kings is arguably *all about* a loss of identity, of which loss of land is finally a function. The division of the kingdom is a first manifestation of this. It is no mere "casting off" of the north. On the contrary, the king of the northern kingdom is regularly styled "the King of Israel", even though it is here that the most profound apostasy comes, even though he is not Davidic, and even though

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<sup>163</sup> T. Collins, *Mantle*, 23.

<sup>164</sup> Wilson, 'The Former Prophets,' 95.

succession is largely by main force. Rather, separation is part of the problematic of being Israel. The question, Who is Israel? hangs over these books.<sup>165</sup>

How then does this relate to questions of coherence in the Elisha narrative? It is, in fact, in these very narratives that Wilson's 'political alliance' and McConville's 'loss of identity' coalesce. Jehoshaphat is judged to be a righteous king in spite of his alliance. But this peace, first with Ahab and then later with his son Jehoram (2 Kgs 3) is merely a ripple on a surface that will soon erupt; the peace will be shattered (2 Kgs 9) and brother will wage war with brother (2 Kgs 14.8). The anonymity (loss of identity) of the King of Israel in chapters 4-8 is often observed. Is it coincidence that this loss of identity, so prevalent in the Elisha narratives - and central to the meaning of the book, spans the narrative distance between the alliance of chapter 3 and the revolution of chapter 9?

The theme of peace in these narratives is frequently placed before us. Beside the 'peace' which Jehoshaphat made, the question, השלום, appears twice in the story of the restoration of the Shunammite's son (2 Kgs 4.23,26). A similar conversational give and take is found in 2 Kgs 5.21 where Gehazi is also queried השלום - a question which he had earlier asked of the Shunammite. The phrase plays a large part in the narrative commencing the revolt of Jehu. It is YHWH's restoration of שלום to a community disrupted by Ahab's crimes that provides the intellectual framework for this story.<sup>166</sup> Is the care shown by Elisha to the community reflective of Yahweh's concern for a restoration of שלום?

### Conclusion

The present study is primarily an attempt to provide a narrative function for the stories in 2 Kings 2-8. The preceding chapter is not an exhaustive survey of the

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<sup>165</sup> J. G. McConville, 'Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings,' *Biblica* 70 (1989) 31-49 (34).

<sup>166</sup> See S. Olyan, 'Hāšālôm: Some Literary Considerations of 2 Kings 9,' *CBQ* 46 (1984) 652-68 (661-62).

Elisha narrative in recent study. Rather, time spent on basic issues such as classification and oral tradition yields a better understanding of why these narratives are thought to lack coherence and integration within Kings. In order to assess the question of coherence, chapter 2 is devoted to an examination of the topic of coherence and the development of a reading model that permits us to view the narrative 'as a single piece of art' while not denying its diversity. Part II of the study (chapters 3-4) establishes the broad and narrow literary contexts in which the stories are interpreted. It does so by examining 2 Kgs 2.1-25, 3.1-27 and 8.16-29 in some detail. Part III (chapters 5-8) contains the bulk of the exegetical work in exploring 2 Kings 4.1-8.15. The final chapter looks beyond the borders of the Elisha narrative to Kings and the Former Prophets as we conclude our attempt to put Elisha in his place.

*Introduction: Assessing the Problem*

It will come as no surprise to students of the Hebrew Bible that the frequency with which the term 'coherence' is used in the field has increased over the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the increased frequency of the term has not helped to answer the question, 'What is coherence?', since the meaning of the word is more often implicitly understood rather than explicitly defined. This is not unusual since the coherence or non-coherence of a text is, by most people, intuitively understood. For example, I. Bellert seeks to provide a working definition of coherence 'which is compatible with the intuitive understanding of these terms.'<sup>2</sup> In similar fashion T. A. van Dijk claims that 'we intuitively know that we do not produce, perceive and interpret texts as an unstructured heap of sentences, nor even merely as a linearly ordered sequence of sentences, but as one global, coherent structure.'<sup>3</sup> This global textual structure van Dijk calls a 'MACRO-STRUCTURE.'

We want to explore further the question of coherence since, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it is often held that the Elisha narrative lacks coherence. In order to do this we will examine the work of both textlinguistic and biblical scholars for whom the concept of textual 'wholeness'<sup>4</sup> is of some importance. Coherence, according to F. Neubauer, 'is one of the central problems in linguistics and

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<sup>1</sup> A search of the word 'coherence' in either the title or the article summary in *Old Testament Abstracts* yields the following number of occurrences for 5 year segments for the twenty year period from 1978-1997: 17 (1978-1982); 28 (1983-1987); 47 (1988-1992); 55 (1993-1997).

<sup>2</sup> I. Bellert, 'On a Condition of the Coherence of Texts,' *Semiotica* 2 (1970) 335-63 (335).

<sup>3</sup> T. A. van Dijk, *Aspects of Text Grammars: A Study in Theoretical Linguistics and Poetics*, *Janua linguarum*, ser. mai. 63 (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1972), 5-6. He is followed here by R. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence - A text theoretical and textlinguistic analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 42.

<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the studies that deal with coherence I will use the terms 'wholeness', 'connectedness', and 'coherence' as synonyms.

particularly in textlinguistics<sup>5</sup> where the question is to define when a text is coherent or when it is said to be non-coherent.<sup>6</sup> Recent works on textlinguistics point out the relative newness of the field and particularly its application to biblical studies.<sup>7</sup> In view of previous treatments of the Elisha narratives, attention to these studies may provide a way forward. However, they provide only one possible approach to

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<sup>5</sup> The field known as 'textlinguistics' in Europe is often known as 'discourse analysis' in the United States. For a concise history of the field see R. -A. de Beaugrande and W. U. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London/New York, 1981), 14-30, or more recently R. -A. de Beaugrande, 'Text Linguistics through the Years,' *Text* 10 (1990) 9-17.

<sup>6</sup> F. Neubauer (ed.), *Coherence in Natural Language Texts*, Papers in Textlinguistics 38 (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1983), vii. It is clear from the literature that it is the textlinguists who attempt to come to terms with this question. See I. Bellert, 'On a Condition of the Coherence of Texts,' *Semiotica* 2 (1970) 335-363; M. Langleben, 'On Verification of Text Coherency,' *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 2 (1978) 155-68; T. Reinhart, 'Conditions of Text Coherence,' *Poetics Today* 1.4 (1980) 161-180; M. Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle in the Interpretation of Discourse,' *Text* 3.1 (1983) 71-97; R. Giora, 'Segmentation and Segment Cohesion: On the Thematic Organization of the Text,' *Text* 3.2 (1983) 155-181; J. Hobbs, 'Why is Discourse Coherent,' in F. Neubauer (ed.), *Coherence in Natural Language Texts*, 29-70; P. Werth, *Focus, Coherence and Emphasis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); R. Giora, 'Notes Towards a Theory of Text Coherence,' *Poetics Today* 6.4 (1985) 699-715. P. H. Fries, 'Language Features, Textual Coherence and Reading,' *Word* 37 (1986) 13-29. Especially helpful are the essay collections: E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity, Text Coherence, Aspects, Methods, Results*, Papers in Textlinguistics 49 (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1985) and M. Conte, J. S. Petöfi, and E. Sözer (eds.), *Text and Discourse Connectedness: Proceedings of the Conference on Connexity and Coherence Urbino, July 16-21, 1984*. Studies in Language Companion Series 16 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> As applied to the Old Testament see F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, *Janua linguarum, ser. prac.* 231 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); R. Longacre, *Joseph*, 1989; M. Eskhult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, *Studia Semitica Upsaliensia* 12 (Uppsala: Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1990); A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, JSOTSup 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); W. R. Bodine (ed.), *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992); Robert D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994); D. A. Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, JSOTSup 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); W. R. Bodine (ed.), *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What it Is and What It Offers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). E. van Wolde, *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996*, BIS 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1997). For New Testament studies see J. T. Reed, 'Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal,' *JETS* 39 (1996) 223-240. Reed points out that in the application of textlinguistics to biblical studies, NT scholars are somewhat behind their OT counterparts, however strides are being made to close this gap (p.228). See for example, S. E. Porter and D. A. Carson (eds.), *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, JSNTSup 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Three essays treat unity in Philippians from varying methodological perspectives but under the rubric of a discourse analysis approach. See the early application by J. P. Louw, 'Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament,' *Technical Papers for the Bible Translator* 24 (1973) 101-18.

narrative study and one's methodological approach to the text is not inconsequential.<sup>8</sup> The present study is not an application of textlinguistic principles to the study of the Elisha narratives.<sup>9</sup> Rather the goal of the present chapter is a better understanding of coherence with an eye towards the development of a model by which to read the Elisha narratives. In relying upon the prior work of scholars from the fields of textlinguistics and biblical studies, we will attempt to determine if there are textual features by which the presence or absence of coherence can be more objectively evaluated. The need for such criteria is observed by S. Porter who comments: 'More explicit criteria need to be developed so that various interpreters can discuss the merits of a given analysis and find a common ground of appeal. The alternative is that textual coherence will remain simply an imposed construct.'<sup>10</sup>

### *Coherence in the Study of the Hebrew Bible*

Along with their linguistic colleagues, biblical scholars have approached the text with a view to various kinds of unity. Coherence has been examined in the study of narrative, more broadly conceived,<sup>11</sup> in the study of individual books or pericopes,<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J. T. Walsh, 'Methods and Meaning: Multiple Studies in 1 Kings 21,' *JBL* 111 (1992) 192-211. Walsh approaches the text of 1 Kgs 21 using three different methods and concludes 'that the choice of a critical method is not a neutral act; it is one of the moves by which a reader contributes to the production of meaning in a literary text' (p.194). Thanks to D. Reimer for bringing this study to my attention.

<sup>9</sup> Attention to text-linguistic concerns is found in B. Doolan Heins, 'From Leprosy to Shalom and back again: a discourse analysis of 2 Kings 5,' *OPTAT* 2 (1988) 20-33 and Maeijer, *Second Elijah*. The latter is a published summary of the original dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> S. E. Porter, 'Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey,' in Porter and Carson (eds.), *Discourse Analysis*, 14-35 (34).

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson, Jr., (eds.), *"Not in Heaven": Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> In chronological order: P. E. Satterthwaite, 'The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2-8,' *TybBul* 49 (1998) 1-28; K. Berge, *Reading Sources in a Text: Coherence and Literary Criticism in the Call of Moses; Models-Methods-Micro-Analysis* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1997); P. R. House, 'Dramatic Coherence in Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah' in J. W. Watts and P. R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, JSOTSup 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 195-208; J. Hunter, *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations*, BEATAJ 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); B. Becking, 'Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Nahum,' *SJOT* 9 (1995) 277-96; H. Viviers, 'The Coherence of the *ma<sup>c</sup>lôt* Psalms (Pss 120-134),' *ZAW* 106 (1994)

and in the study of linguistics.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this increase in studies on ‘coherence’, R. C. Culley still wonders, ‘how does one track coherence in biblical narrative?’<sup>14</sup> Culley himself goes some way in providing an answer to this question by exploring the manner in which coherence has been treated in several literary and biblical studies. Among scholars who adopt a more literary perspective he summarises those who read the text as a unity (Frye, Sternberg, Polzin), those who read the text as a composite (Alter, Damrosch, Greenstein, Jobling), and those who believe the text is problematic and requires the adoption of specific reading strategies (feminist, deconstructionist, post-structuralist, and postmodernist readings).<sup>15</sup> After reviewing the works of N. Frye,<sup>16</sup> M. Sternberg,<sup>17</sup> and R. Polzin,<sup>18</sup> Culley points to their collective agreement that whatever the past history of the text, its ‘present blend

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275-89; W. Brueggemann, ‘Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18,’ *CBQ* 55 (1993) 225-43; R. B. Robinson, ‘The Coherence of the Jericho Narrative,’ in R. Bartelmus, T. Krüger, and H. Utzschneider (eds.), *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Klaus Baltzer zum 65. Geburtstag*, OBO 126 (Fribourg: Editions universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 311-35; R. C. Culley, ‘Psalm 3: Content, Context, and Coherence,’ in W. Gross, H. Irsigler, and T. Seidl (eds.), *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65. Geburtstag* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1991), 29-39; V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, SBLDS 118 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); S. D. Snyman, ‘Cohesion in the Book of Obadiah,’ *ZAW* 101 (1989) 59-71; D. G. Hagstrom, *The Coherence of the Book of Micah: A Literary Analysis*, SBLDS 89 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); G. J. Wenham, ‘The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,’ *VT* 28 (1978) 336-48.

<sup>13</sup> A. Niccacci, ‘Finite Verb in the Second Position of the Sentence: Coherence of the Hebrew Verbal System,’ *ZAW* 108 (1996) 434-40; F. I. Andersen, ‘Linguistic Coherence in Prophetic Discourse,’ in A. Beck, A. H. Bartelt, P. R. Raabe, and C. A. Franke, *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 137-56; There are related studies like D. Gropp, ‘Progress and Cohesion in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: The Function of *kē-/bē-* + the Infinitive Construct,’ in W. R. Bodine, (ed.), *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What it Is and What It Offers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 183-212; A. Berlin, ‘Lexical Cohesion and Biblical Interpretation,’ *HS* 30 (1989) 29-40.

<sup>14</sup> R. C. Culley, review of *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, SBLDS 118 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), by V. Philips Long, in *CBQ* 54 (1992) 117-18 (118).

<sup>15</sup> R. C. Culley, *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative*, SBLSS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 25-36.

<sup>16</sup> N. Frye, *The Great Code: the Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 87. It is Frye’s idea of repeated narrative patterns that Culley finds so helpful (*Themes*, 26).

<sup>17</sup> M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Part One: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980).

manifests a strong measure of coherence, and it is to this whole that primary attention should be paid.’<sup>19</sup> Culley himself, taking a cue from Polzin’s idea of competing textual points of view, prefers to consider ‘both the coherence and the tensions’ contained in the text.<sup>20</sup> The problem, as Culley sees it, is how to treat a composite and traditional text which, at the same time, ‘has substantial coherence’.<sup>21</sup>

Culley does not propose specific textual features by which coherence may be discerned but explores the way that ‘repeated action sequences’ of narrative blocks may ‘produce a redundancy that may help create a sense of coherence’ within disparate material.<sup>22</sup> His ideas of coherence may be likened to those of Alter who observes that a coherent reading requires an awareness of conventions.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note the numerous Elisha narratives that Culley includes within this treatment of unifying ‘themes’: 2 Kgs 2.1-18; 2 Kgs 4.42-44 (announcement sequences); 2 Kgs 2.23-25 (punishment sequence); 2 Kgs 2.19-22; 2 Kgs 4.1-7, 18-32, 38-41, 2 Kgs 6.1-7 (rescue sequences); 2 Kgs 5 (desire sequence). He then examines ways in which these themes are varied in a number of stories. While the varied patterns favour ‘multiformity and openness’ the repeated patterns ‘encourage a sense of coherence and closure.’<sup>24</sup> ‘Syntagmatically’ these sequences are bound together and create forward narrative progress in the telling of Israel’s story. Occasionally long stretches of text are tied together as, for example, in the book Joshua where early announcement that the land will be given eventually comes to

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<sup>19</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 29. In Polzin’s case we may add ‘at least initially’.

<sup>20</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 29. Culley differs from Polzin in that the latter does not view these tensions as arising from varying sources or traditions. Culley later argues that ‘coherence’ ought not to be strictly associated with the literary approach nor ‘tension’ with the historical critical approach. Instead coherence and tension are ‘important characteristics of the biblical text and warrant attention in any critical discussion’ (pp.29, 36).

<sup>21</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 52. The word ‘redundancy’ does not have a negative connotation here. Culley identifies repetitive sequences such as punishment, rescue, achievement, reward, announcement, and prohibition (p.56).

<sup>23</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: BasicBooks, 1981), 47, 62. Elsewhere Alter notes that motifs may provide ‘formal coherence to a narrative’ (p.95).

<sup>24</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 170.

fruition in Jos. 11.23.<sup>25</sup> These narrative patterns also function 'paradigmatically' to hold narrative together. Culley writes, 'The very repetition of the same sequences (the iteration of the themes of rescue, punishment, achievement, and announcement, for example) provides a redundancy that fosters a sense of the coherence of biblical narrative.'<sup>26</sup>

D. G. Hagstrom, in his study of coherence in Micah, states that literature 'displays coherence or unity when it is capable of being construed as a unit.'<sup>27</sup> Of course the immediate question is, 'When is literature capable of being construed as a unit?' Hagstrom responds that we can view a piece of literary discourse as a unit 'when there are features within the text that hold it together, that make it cohere, that provide keys as to how it might be construed.'<sup>28</sup> His method is inductive as he analyses the language of Micah 'to show how that coherence is expressed in terms of concrete literary features' and 'to compile features constitutive of coherence and thus to provide a description in terms drawn from the book itself.'<sup>29</sup> Thus he differs from Culley in his close attention to linguistic features. These features include inter- and intra- sentential syntax, stylistic devices, rhetorical form, and commonality of theme.<sup>30</sup>

Hagstrom has produced a careful exegetical study of Micah; however, his treatment of coherence raises an uncomfortable question. He claims that a text is coherent when it may be construed as a unit and may be construed as a unit when there are textual features that make it cohere. However, given enough time, patience, imagination and effort could we not end up saying that any text is capable of being

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<sup>25</sup> An example from Kings would be the cry against the altar in 1 Kgs 13.2 and its fulfilment in 2 Kgs 23.15-17.

<sup>26</sup> Culley, *Themes*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 42-43, 127. Hagstrom also includes 'poetic devices.' However, nearly all of his features could be subsumed under such a heading.

construed as a unit?<sup>31</sup> Porter's warning of an 'imposed construct' ('construed as') and need for 'explicit criteria' ('features within the text') point to a difficulty that we will need to keep before us. If external textual features were sufficient to label a text coherent, we could merely compile a list of features and compare the list with the Elisha narratives to see how they match up. Such a list could be used to ask whether, and to what extent, the narratives of 2 Kgs 2-8 manifested any of the presumed features of literary wholeness.<sup>32</sup> Likewise we could harvest presumed features of coherence directly from the text of 2 Kgs 2-8 and then use those characteristics to establish that the text is coherent.

Both Culley and Hagstrom are to be commended for their more explicit struggle with the question of coherence.<sup>33</sup> Culley's narrative patterns may be of some help in gaining an impression of the prophet Elisha from like-minded stories, but less helpful in assessing the overall function of those stories within Kings or their particular linguistic characteristics. Hagstrom's study needs to take into consideration the distinction between cohesion and coherence to which we will return. Many explorations of the subject within biblical studies simply assume what was stated at the outset of this chapter, namely, that the concept of textual coherence is intuitively understood. Again this is not necessarily a fatal flaw. However, it does point to the need for some reflection on the question of coherence since it does little good to discuss the coherence or incoherence (historical, literary, theological, conceptual, etc.) of biblical texts unless we first know what is meant in the use of the term. There

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<sup>31</sup> Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 162. See also M. Charolles, 'Text Connexity, Text Coherence and Text Interpretation Processing,' in E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity*, 1-15 (3) where he writes 'given a set of consecutive sentences apparently unlinked, it is always possible to construct an ad hoc situation wherein their enunciation becomes coherent.' Charolles provides several examples in which the 'ad hoc situation' makes the recovery of coherence possible – at least at the sentence level. For example, the sentence 'John thinks with a knife' (p.4), does not strike us as a particularly coherent sentence until the context is provided and we learn that it is perfectly feasible as an answer to the question, 'With what instrument has the postman been murdered?' The creation of such 'ad hoc situations' may be much less convincing for more complex discourses.

<sup>32</sup> Likewise lack of such features could be used to show that the narratives are incoherent.

<sup>33</sup> This could be said also for Berge, *Reading Sources*, 32-40.

may be different kinds and expressions of coherence within biblical texts.<sup>34</sup> We will focus upon narrative (or textual) coherence.

### *Textlinguistics and Poetics: Tools for the Exploration of Coherence*

The relationship and concerns of (text)linguistics and poetics are relevant to this study since we are seeking help from both fields in our examination of the Elisha narratives, particularly with respect to coherence. T. A. van Dijk argues for the fundamental contact between linguistics and poetics at the level of philosophy of science.<sup>35</sup> He claims that the methods of inquiry in each of these approaches do not differ significantly. Although the objects of their inquiry, namely language in the case of linguistics and literature in the case of poetics, have differing properties there is no distinction between their fundamental methodological procedures.<sup>36</sup> Both are concerned with the 'formulation of rules' and 'underlying regularities' although those with which the linguist deals are much more stable.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the basic methods which they share, there are also common descriptive and explanatory techniques along with a common task. Altogether these shared concerns place linguistics and poetics within the complex of social sciences.<sup>38</sup> Van Dijk concludes that linguistics is fundamental not only to poetics but for all social

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<sup>34</sup> Hagstrom, *Coherence*, 125; House, 'Dramatic Coherence,' 195.

<sup>35</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*. See especially chapter 5 'Linguistics and Poetics' for his theoretical discussion. One of van Dijk's aims is the extension of linguistics into textual discussion in order to provide 'a more adequate basis for a description of literary texts.' Linguistics has a role in literary theory 'in so far as it helps to resolve the problems of poetics proper' (p.202). In his discussion of textlinguistics M. Silva, *God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics*, FCI 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 119 n.24 has called van Dijk's work 'comprehensive and influential.' For a brief discussion of MACRO-STRUCTURE see de Beaugrande and Dressler, *Introduction*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 202. The 'epistemological objects' of language and literature are different however, 'the description and explanation of these properties' share methodological pathways.

<sup>37</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 202-03.

<sup>38</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 203. While van Dijk rejects 'the traditional hermeneutic distinction between the methods of the natural sciences and those of the social sciences' (202) he does not deny the obvious fact that for many of the humanities there is no possibility for experimentation. 'Human (inter-)action has an essentially irreversible and historical character and behaviour is only rarely identical under similar situations' (203).

sciences as well. Poetics finds its place either under the auspices of linguistic study or perhaps alongside linguistics as a 'science of texts'.<sup>39</sup> Their tasks and goals, if not identical, are at least similar. Linguistics could serve as a model for poetics not only on the basis of shared goals, but also because it is 'more advanced in descriptive and theoretical techniques.'<sup>40</sup> However, linguistics does much more than merely provide a theory-producing model for literary scholarship. Rather, almost by definition, linguistics provides a general foundation for poetics which is its own separate yet dependent discipline.<sup>41</sup>

R. Jakobson notes that it is with poetics that we seek to answer the question, 'What makes a verbal message a work of art?'<sup>42</sup>

Poetics deals primarily with problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. Since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics.<sup>43</sup>

Thus both fields are concerned with the description and explanation of 'texts and their structural properties': linguistics provides this description in a general way, poetics for texts in particular.<sup>44</sup> By 'poetics' van Dijk refers 'to the whole complex of empirical and theoretical study of literary texts and literary communication, both

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<sup>39</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 204.

<sup>40</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 205.

<sup>41</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 204-05.

<sup>42</sup> R. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics,' in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language* (New York/London: The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley & Sons, 1960), 350-77 (350) (author's emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics,' 350. Jakobson considers 'flagrant anachronisms' the linguist unaware of the poetics of language and the literary scholar who ignores linguistics (377).

<sup>44</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 205. He claims elsewhere, 'Although the empirical domains seem to be identical at first sight, or at least intersecting, both disciplines study different aspects of texts and textual communication' (208). Biblical scholar Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 55 describes the relationship in a similar fashion: 'Herein lies the real task of narrative poetics: to extract from the surface structure of the text (i.e., its linguistic structure) indicators of its poetic (or compositional) structure.' Berlin (149 n.39) in citing the work of B. Uspensky, *The Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 69, 71 also points out that a linguistic phenomenon such as narrative tense may also have a role as a poetic phenomenon.

synchronical and diachronical.’<sup>45</sup> M. Sternberg claims that poetics ‘is the systematic working or study of literature as such.’<sup>46</sup> For H. C. Brichto it is ‘the isolation of elements, features, and techniques employed by a creative author to bring a story to life.’<sup>47</sup> A. Berlin brings together the above definitions by providing a nice analogy:

Poetics, the science of literature, is not an interpretive effort – it does not aim to elicit meaning from a text. Rather it aims to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled. In order to explain poetics as a discipline, a linguistic model is frequently offered: poetics is to literature as linguistics is to language. That is, poetics describes the basic components of literature and the rules governing their use. Poetics strives to write a grammar, as it were, of literature....If literature is likened to a cake, then poetics gives us the recipe and interpretation tells us how it tastes.<sup>48</sup>

Since cake eating is so much more enjoyable than recipe reading, we will attempt to provide an interpretation of the Elisha narratives that does not neglect the building blocks of the recipe.<sup>49</sup>

We now turn to take a brief look at textlinguistics since it is the text-linguists who ask the question, ‘What makes a text coherent?’ J. Reed recognises that the influences of such wide ranging subjects as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology and artificial intelligence make textlinguistics a multi-disciplinary field. Still, he argues, it is possible to highlight four major tenets that ‘characterize core beliefs of modern discourse analysts as found in their writings.’<sup>50</sup> First the textlinguistic approach maintains the role of author, text, and audience in the communicative event. It does not abandon the possibility of authorial intention but neither does it deny the fact that hearers and readers have a strong desire to make sense of what is being communicated to them. It is important to approach the Elisha

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<sup>45</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 169.

<sup>46</sup> M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> H. C. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), vii.

<sup>48</sup> Berlin, *Poetics*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Berlin treats such building blocks as ‘characterisation’ (description, inner life, speech and actions) and ‘point of view’ (naming, inner life, use of הנהגה, circumstantial clauses, direct discourse and narration, alternative expressions).

<sup>50</sup> Reed, ‘Discourse Analysis,’ 229.

narratives with a model that maintains the importance of author(s)/editor(s) and text while not losing sight of the importance of the reader. Along with authors and readers, the linguistic orientation of the approach ties it closely to the text. In summarising this first major tenet we might ask what is the author(s) attempting to communicate, how is the text shaped as an act of communication, and how does the reader respond?<sup>51</sup>

Another feature of textlinguistics, and arguably its best known feature, is the emphasis on the examination of linguistic levels beyond the sentence. Textlinguists do not deny the need to investigate words and clauses. Rather emphasis is placed upon a bottom/up and top/down approach that moves from morphology upwards through sentences, paragraphs, and pericopes and finally to larger discourse concerns and then reverses that process.<sup>52</sup> The application to the question of genre is apparent since it is necessary to allow the parts to influence the whole and for the whole to inform the parts. Theoretically it may be best to identify genre before examining the parts of a discourse; however, in practice one's initial genre decisions must be reshaped and re-tested continuously.<sup>53</sup>

An eye to broader discourse concerns may assist in the investigation of the individual pericope and how, if at all, these relate to one another in terms of a larger narrative function. It is not merely individual stories taken separately which provide meaning, but those stories in relationship to one another, even where they may appear to have no direct connection.<sup>54</sup> In summary we might ask how does the

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<sup>51</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 235.

<sup>52</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 232. This is simply an appropriate exegetical method.

<sup>53</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 232. On the issue of genre as part of the 'hermeneutical circle' see J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 18; R. Detweiler, 'How to Read a Jaguar: A Response to Mary Gerhart,' *Semeia* 43 (1988) 45-51 (47). Brichto, *Grammar*, 27 claims that genre categorisation must follow exegesis: 'Only when a consistent and satisfying exegesis of a given narrative has been achieved should we ask which, if any, genre label is most apposite to our narrative.'

<sup>54</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 10 makes a related point when he writes 'The message emerges from what happens among stories rather than from the individual stories themselves.' Here he is summarising the arguments of C. Lévi-Strauss's essay 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *Structural*

information stored in the individual stories bear upon other stories in the narrative and what is the overall force of the total?

A third tenet of textlinguistics emphasises its social role and function; it concentrates on language-as-use (*parole*). Discourse is viewed as a communicative event rather than a set of propositions.<sup>55</sup> Here we will attempt some explanation for the function of the Elisha narratives in context. It may be appropriate to hypothesise concerning the social factors that influenced the inclusion of the Elisha narratives within Kings.

Finally, textlinguistics is concerned with evaluating discourse for the presence or absence of coherence. The grammar and syntax, semantics and pragmatics that comprise texts, in combination with a thematic element, enable readers/listeners to recognise that a discourse is coherent.<sup>56</sup> Reed points out that texts often fall somewhere between two opposing poles. On the one hand are those that have a great deal of unity and cohesiveness. Opposite this are those texts that are merely a collection of words with little textuality. Most texts actually fall somewhere in between these two poles.<sup>57</sup>

### The Appearance of Coherence

According to the seminal work of de Beaugrande and Dressler, cohesion and coherence are among the seven standards of textuality which determine the effectiveness of narrative communication.<sup>58</sup> These standards are classified as either

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*Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967). R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 127-54 provides a good discussion of the way that the paratactic and episodic organisation of Mark's gospel provides 'implicit commentary'.

<sup>55</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 233.

<sup>56</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 234.

<sup>57</sup> Reed, 'Discourse Analysis,' 234.

<sup>58</sup> R. -A. de Beaugrande and W. U. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, (London/New York, 1981), 3. A text is truly a text when it has met these seven standards. A challenge to this view is found in Willie van Peer, 'The Concept of Cohesion: its Empirical Status in a Definition and Typology of Texts,' in Conte, Petöfi, and Sözer (eds.), *Text and Discourse Connectedness*, 291-308. Van Peer

text-centred (cohesion and coherence) or user-centred (intentionality, acceptability; informativity, situationality, intertextuality).<sup>59</sup> It is the text-centred features which concern us here. Cohesion deals with surface features of the text, the actual words which we see or hear.<sup>60</sup> These cohesive features bind sentences together in semantic or grammatical relationships such that we may speak of lexical cohesion or grammatical cohesion.<sup>61</sup>

Underneath the textual surface is a configuration of concepts and relations or a 'textual world.' Coherence has to do with the ways in which these components (i.e., the concepts and relations) are '*mutually accessible and relevant.*'<sup>62</sup> For example, if while driving we encounter a sign which reads,

SLOW  
CHILDREN  
AT  
PLAY

it is unlikely that we will take the word 'slow' as an adjective describing inactive children rather than a warning about our motoring speed. Textual coherence demands an interaction between what is presented in the text and what is known of the world.<sup>63</sup> Strictly speaking, therefore, coherence is not a solely text based feature of textuality since it is 'a matter of semantic and pragmatic relations in the text' and dependent

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thinks it likely that all of these standards are problematic, but is primarily concerned to show that cohesion is not a necessary precondition for the category *text* (292).

<sup>59</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, *Introduction*, 4-12. *Intentionality* refers to the text producer's concern to create a cohesive and coherent text that fulfils intentions such as the distribution of knowledge or the attainment of a goal (p.7). On the other hand *acceptability* concerns the text receiver's attitude that a cohesive and coherent text should have 'some use' for the receiver (p.7). *Informativity* deals with whether occurrences in the text are known versus unknown or expected versus unexpected (pp.8-9). According to *situationality*, a text must be relevant to its particular context of occurrence (p.9). Finally, *intertextuality*, concerns ways in which the use of one text is dependent 'upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts' (p.10).

<sup>60</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, *Introduction*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> R. Sydserrff and P. Weetman, 'A Texture Index for Evaluating Accounting Narratives,' *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 12 (1999) 459-88 (462).

<sup>62</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, *Introduction*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler, *Introduction*, 6.



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the hope that the exegesis which follows will be better informed. In order to do this we will review a number of studies which examine the question of textual coherence.

Views of coherence may be summarised according to three positions. In the first, a discourse is coherent if it expounds upon the same topic. Here topic is equated with 'the entity which the discourse is about.'<sup>70</sup> The second view holds a discourse to be coherent if the utterances of the discourse are believed to be part of some overarching plan or goal of the discourse. To recognise coherence then, we need to deduce the plan of the speaker or writer and consider how the parts fit into the whole. Coherence as a reflection of memory comprises the third view. J. Hobbs writes, 'The structure of discourse reflects somehow the structure of memory, either the pre-existing structure of the contents of memory, or the structure of the way we are reminded of things by other things.'<sup>71</sup> For ease of reference we may call these (1) coherence as discourse topic, (2) coherence as global intention, and (3) coherence as mental representation.

### Coherence as discourse topic

R. Giora provides an example of a linguist who considers the idea of 'discourse topic' to be crucial for the notion of text coherence. Most prior treatments of coherence had considered the linear connectedness (cohesion) of sentences to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for coherence.<sup>72</sup> T. Reinhart, for example, argues that for a text to be considered coherent it must meet three conditions: it must be cohesive (connected), consistent, and relevant.<sup>73</sup> The first of these (cohesion)

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<sup>70</sup> Hobbs, 'Why is Discourse Coherent?,' 36. While Hobbs does not hold this position we rely upon his analysis.

<sup>71</sup> Hobbs, 'Why is Discourse Coherent?,' 37. A similar three-fold categorisation of views is summarised by H. A. Dry, 'Approaches to Coherence in Natural and Literary Narrative,' in E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity*, 484-99 (484).

<sup>72</sup> Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?' in E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity*, 16-35 (16).

<sup>73</sup> Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 164. Another linguist who argues for cohesion as a necessary but not sufficient aspect of coherence is I. Bellert, 'On a Condition,' 335-63.

requires that 'each sentence is connected to a previous sentence in the text.'<sup>74</sup> Most of Reinhart's article focuses on the question of cohesion which is viewed in terms of linear connections. The second condition, consistency, requires that sentences reflect a non-contradictory view of the world, that is to say the sentences 'can be all true in the same state of affairs.'<sup>75</sup> Finally, the conditions for relevance are both semantic and pragmatic; relevance concerns the relationships between sentences as well as the relations of these sentences 'to an underlying discourse topic, or theme, as well as their relations with the context of the utterance.'<sup>76</sup> It is this notion of 'discourse topic' which Giora, a student of Reinhart's, has developed.

Claiming that cohesion is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition<sup>77</sup> for coherence, Giora argues that cohesion 'ultimately has little to offer for the investigation of text coherence.'<sup>78</sup> Instead, in order for a text to be coherent it must be organised according to a 'discourse topic' or 'organizing principle'.<sup>79</sup> A text is coherent then, if its segments are either 'interpretable as being about a DT' (discourse topic) or 'signalled as a digression by a digression marker.'<sup>80</sup> But what of a collection

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<sup>74</sup> Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 167. What this means practically is that sentences, in order to be cohesive, must be either 'referentially linked' (e.g., anaphora) or 'linked by a semantic sentence connector' which mark semantic relations like cause and effect, comparison, contrast, temporal relations, etc. (p.176).

<sup>75</sup> Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 164. Reinhart provides an example of a sentence that does not meet the consistency requirement which comes from an interview with a schizophrenic patient: "'I was living at home. But my father is dead now...That's why you can say he's probably decided to smoke a pipe'" [the interviewer was smoking a pipe]. Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 164 citing T. Freeman, J. L. Cameron and A. McGhie, *Studies in Psychosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1966) [no page number provided].

<sup>76</sup> Reinhart, 'Conditions,' 164.

<sup>77</sup> Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?,' 16-17.

<sup>78</sup> Giora, 'Notes Towards a Theory,' 714; id., 'What's a Coherent Text?,' 26. Giora provides examples of non-cohesive texts which are coherent (i.e., not necessary, p.18), and cohesive texts which are not coherent (i.e., not sufficient, p.16). An example of the latter is: 'Mira lives near Beth. Beth has a moustache. She went on a trip yesterday. Yesterday was a rainy day.'

<sup>79</sup> Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?,' 16, 20. Giora has reduced Reinhart's 'relevance' requirement to the notion of 'discourse topic' which, she admits, is not adequate. It remains an open question how this discourse topic is to be derived. While recognising the shortcomings she still believes the approach is heading in the right direction (p. 30 n.4).

<sup>80</sup> Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?,' 23; id., 'Notes Towards a Theory,' 707-08. What then is a 'connector marking the digression'? With minor changes we note Giora's example ('Notes,' 708) of a digression marker. The inappropriate sequence – 'Erin is never home nowadays because she lives near

of stories like 2 Kgs 2-8 which contains a variety of stories with discourse topics appearing to have little relationship to one another. Here, Giora claims, there is still the possibility of wholeness:

That is, for various text segments with different discourse topics to meet the relevance requirement, they must be related to an underlying hyper discourse topic in terms of aboutness; they must be interpretable as being about a hyper theme which the text/discourse as whole is actually about.<sup>81</sup>

J. Licht takes a similar approach in his brief treatment of coherence. Contents or a recurrent motif may provide interconnections. Stories which deal 'with some person or theme' may be read as a narrative sequence but this does not remove the fact that the stories remain separate both 'structurally and formally'.<sup>82</sup> He continues: 'Such sequences, bunches, chains, or cycles of stories are not carefully wrought as wholes by the storytellers, but rather casually put together. We have the stories of Elijah, not a story of his life.'<sup>83</sup> We would agree that the stories are distinct and that we are not dealing with a biography in the modern sense; however, we question whether 'casually put together' is an appropriate description for the Elijah and Elisha collections.

### Coherence as global intention

M. Charolles provides an example of a linguist who understands coherence in terms of global intention. While the 'problem' of coherence is particularly acute for the linguist, it may not be a linguistic problem only.<sup>84</sup> The discernment of coherence

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school. School, you know, is the centre of the kids' social life. Nathan has missed school a lot this year. He never showed up at judo either' -- is contrasted with a more coherent sequence due to connectors marking a digression: 'Erin is never home nowadays because she lives near school. School, you know, is the centre of the kids' social life. Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that Nathan has missed school a lot this year. He never showed up at judo either.'

<sup>81</sup> Giora, 'Notes Towards a Theory,' 710.

<sup>82</sup> J. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 123.

<sup>83</sup> Licht, *Storytelling*, 123-24. If this is so of Elijah stories it may be asserted of the Elisha stories as well.

<sup>84</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 78.

is required not only in matters of textual interpretation, biblical or otherwise, but is more generally a feature of human communication and action.<sup>85</sup> Whenever we see another person performing an action or series of actions, we assume the action is motivated by some intention or may be explained by some condition.<sup>86</sup> For example, seeing my neighbour place a string along the ground and then pile rocks up along the string I suppose that she intends to build a wall. That is, I assume a certain 'intelligibility' to what I observe and intention to the series of actions I witness. I hypothesise about a larger 'global project' in which the individual actions (i.e., placing rocks along a string) are part of a larger purpose (building a wall). Charolles likens this recognition of the 'coherent whole' to the realisation of a 'global intention'. In order to understand this series of actions coherently '*we merely need to associate some global intention with it, that explains it as a unit.*'<sup>87</sup>

Charolles proceeds to argue for an analogy between the observation of a person building a wall and the comprehension of a discourse: 'Following a conversation, listening to a talk, or reading a printed text is, in a way, similar to witnessing an action.'<sup>88</sup> Each case requires analysis and interpretation. However, discourse is somewhat different. While actions are not usually performed in order to convey a message, 'whoever speaks or writes is necessarily doing so because he intends to signify, however indirectly, something to an audience'.<sup>89</sup> Like the recognition that the separate and individual actions of piling stone upon stone implies a larger goal of

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<sup>85</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 72; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 228.

<sup>86</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 72.

<sup>87</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence,' 72 (author's emphasis). Charolles' concludes that texts are not inherently coherent or incoherent but rather all depends upon the receiver (p.95). This is an odd conclusion in light of 'intention' or 'communication.' Elsewhere he claims that a producer (i.e., writer, speaker etc.) must give the receiver (i.e., reader) 'all the elements necessary to help him make the correct calculations, and indeed to provide him with the maximum of data, so that he is required to do as little as possible' (p.91). This raises several questions. First, why *must* a writer do this? Second, how can all depend on the reader if so much is required of the writer?

<sup>88</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 74.

<sup>89</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 76. With respect to the non-message of actions one may immediately think of counter examples. Perhaps the implicature of building the wall is to provide me the not so subtle message that I am an intrusive neighbour (p.75).

wall-building, the utterances of a discourse require the discernment of a 'global intention' which explain what is being communicated.<sup>90</sup> This notion of 'global intention' is similar to van Dijk's 'macro-structure', that is, an overarching structure which characterises discourse.<sup>91</sup> In modern linguistic study the idea of a global structure may be traced back to Z. S. Harris who was the first modern linguist to view 'discourse' as an appropriate object of linguistic study. In Harris' view, discourse analysis was a method by which to ascertain 'some global structure characterizing the whole discourse (the linear material) or large sections of it.'<sup>92</sup> The discernment of a global construct – while to a some extent a mental process of the reader – is not entirely arbitrary, being constrained by a host of contextual matters. M. Sternberg agrees with this view, observing that hypothesis construction (or gap filling as he calls it) 'is directed by aesthetic clues and conventions.'<sup>93</sup>

The relevance of the prior discussion to the present study is apparent, since in 2 Kings 2-8 we are faced with a series of tales (both short and long) which, like rocks along a string, often have no clear connection. The establishment of a 'global intention-as-hypothesis' may help us to interpret subsequent individual actions (or narratives) as part of an overarching purpose, and in fact our presumed global intention may help us to test the hypothesis. The ability to 'predict' future narratives within a larger story (or perhaps it would be better to say the ability to account for the presence of narratives within a larger story), based on an assumed global intention, may help us to reject, adjust, or confirm our attempt at a coherent reading.<sup>94</sup> Such strategies are already at work in the field of biblical studies. Some

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<sup>90</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 77.

<sup>91</sup> van Dijk, *Aspects*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Z. S. Harris, *Discourse Analysis Reprints* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 17 in van Dijk, *Aspects*, 26. The idea of 'global structure' is in van Dijk's opinion the most important aspect of Harris' definition (p. 27).

<sup>93</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics*, 228.

<sup>94</sup> A classic study on hypothesis construction and the process of reading is M. Perry, 'Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates its Meanings,' *Poetics Today* 1 (1979) 35-61. See also Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?,' 30 n.3; Langleben, 'On Verification,' 155-68.

interpreters have made general comments on the relationship between the Moses/Joshua and Elijah/Elisha stories,<sup>95</sup> while others have made the connection between Joshua and Elisha more explicit.<sup>96</sup> What if we assume that the portrayal of Elisha as a 'second Joshua' in 2 Kgs 2, is the global intention which provides a key for the remainder of the narratives (2 Kgs 3-8). It is just this strategy which is adopted by P. Satterthwaite in his recent study of coherence in these stories.<sup>97</sup> It may be that the narrative 'parts' following 2 Kings 2 only make sense when read with this global 'whole' in mind.

Then again maybe not. Recognising coherence in some overall intention is fine provided both participants in the communicative act know that a plan is being followed.<sup>98</sup> The suggestion of a global intention which leads to a plausible explanation of narrative function within a segment of 2 Kings is only the beginning. Each explanation given can itself be subject to scrutiny. If we assume that a man is moving stones because he wants to build a wall, we may still ask why he wants to build a wall.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, suggesting a global intention for the Elisha narratives will itself be open to scrutiny on a number of fronts; even if a probable global intention is established by means of the narratives and their immediate context, we may ask why one particular image (e.g., Elisha as second Joshua) was selected over some other. Of

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<sup>95</sup> J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 354; J. Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings*, CBC (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 23-4; J. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 475; A. G. Auld, *Kings*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press and Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) 153-54.

<sup>96</sup> T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 19; B. O. Long, *2 Kings*, 31; P. R. House, *Kings*, NAC 8 (Broadman & Holman, 1995), 257; I. Provan, *Kings*, 173. For a more detailed examination of the question see R. Carroll, 'The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel,' *VT* 19 (1969) 400-15; C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "'Josua" und "Elischa" – eine biblische Argumentation zur Begründung der Autorität und Legitimität des Nachfolgers,' *ZAW* 101 (1989) 198-222.

<sup>97</sup> See Satterthwaite, 'The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2-8,' *TynBul* 49 (1998) 1-28. Satterthwaite argues that Elisha as 'second Joshua' is the 'key' to understanding 2 Kings 2-8.

<sup>98</sup> Hobbs, 'Why is Discourse Coherent,' 37. Hobbs claims that this view of coherence is 'too strong' since participants may have only a superficial understanding of one another's goals and yet still move forward in conversation.

<sup>99</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence,' 72-3.

course in a composite text there is the even more troublesome question, 'whose intention?' or 'which author?'. The provision of a coherent reading provides no certainty that the author or redactor ever intended it as such.<sup>100</sup>

### Coherence as mental representation

In what has been uncharacteristic for biblical studies, E. van Wolde addresses the issue of coherence at a more theoretical level which emphasises the work of the reader in the creation of coherence. That is to say, van Wolde does not simply intuit her understanding of coherence or appeal only to elements of cohesion. She claims that in building coherence the reader is guided by four elements: (1) 'textual cohesive features'; (2) 'cultural and language habits'; (3) 'an inferring process' or what she earlier had called 'the mental activity of representation'; and (4) 'an incorporation of pre-existing knowledge.'<sup>101</sup> It is cohesion that provides the primary element for coherence building so that textually based features will guide the creation of a 'coherent mental representation' by the reader.<sup>102</sup> While coherence is built from cohesion, cohesion is built from 'foreground' material, i.e., the chain of *wayyiqtol* verbs ('the main cohesion-building feature of a text')<sup>103</sup> along with 'background' material introduced by nominal and circumstantial clauses.<sup>104</sup> Van Wolde also notes that the narrator 'grounds' knowledge shared with the reader either by providing *anaphoric* information which relates to the preceding text or by providing *cataphoric* information which gives clues for the how the following narrative should be read.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> See the trenchant remarks of J. Barton, *Reading*, 54-55 with respect to literary coherence and redactional intention.

<sup>101</sup> E. van Wolde, 'The Creation of Coherence,' *Semeia* 81 (1998) 159-74 (172). See page 169 where 'mental representation' replaces the 'inferring process.' Sternberg, *Poetics*, 189 provides a similar set of factors.

<sup>102</sup> van Wolde, 'Creation of Coherence,' 172.

<sup>103</sup> van Wolde, 'Creation of Coherence,' 170.

<sup>104</sup> van Wolde, 'Creation of Coherence,' 169. The background material comprises such features as those clauses which are marked by אֲשֶׁר, *x-qatal*, *x-yiqtol*, or *x-qotel*.

<sup>105</sup> van Wolde, 'Creation of Coherence,' 170.

With respect to this last point there are, within the Elisha narratives, many stories commencing with the subject + *qatal*.<sup>106</sup>

The 'coherence building' aspect of cohesive features proposed by van Wolde appears to run contrary to Giora, who claims that cohesion is derivative from, or a by-product of, coherence. Instead cohesion, according to Giora, functions to 'help mark and identify the DT.'<sup>107</sup> However, it appears somewhat confusing of Giora to claim that coherence is 'independent of cohesion' if cohesion actually helps to identify a discourse topic which in turn is required for the discernment of coherence. On the other hand, Bellert would agree with van Wolde that inference plays a part in the development of coherence. We use both deductive reasoning and 'implicational generalisations' derived inductively via our knowledge of the world 'in order to obtain those conclusions that appear to be necessary for the interpretation of a coherent text, that is to say, to obtain the missing connections not explicitly expressed.'<sup>108</sup>

This highlights one of the chief questions concerning coherence: to what degree is the reader responsible for the production of coherence and to what extent is it dependent upon the author(s) or editor(s) of the text? To what extent is it text-based and to what extent is it reader-based?<sup>109</sup> And so we return to Porter's warning of 'imposed construct' and the need for 'objective criteria.' It is here that a majority of biblical studies on 'coherence' fall short because they neglect the reader's part in the creation of coherence.

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<sup>106</sup> 2 Kgs 3.1; 4.1, 38, 42; 5.1; 6.8; 8.1; 9.1; 13.14. See the discussion of the northern prophetic narratives in M. Eskhult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect*, 50-57. Eskhult proposes that the subject + *qatal* in the clause initial position is an aspect of 'Hebrew narrative art' reflecting 'oral narrative technique' (p.57).

<sup>107</sup> Giora, 'What's a Coherent Text?', 26. Recall DT = discourse topic.

<sup>108</sup> Bellert, 'On a Condition,' 361. The filling in of the gap between what is expressed and what is inferred has been addressed by Sternberg, *Poetics*, 186-229, 247-49.

<sup>109</sup> Charolles, 'Coherence as a Principle,' 86. In the context of asking this question Charolles argues that the distinction between cohesion and coherence is exaggerated since even cohesive markers (like anaphora) must be rightly perceived (pp.86-87). He claims this is 'an embarrassing question' because if cohesion is not an aspect of the data then all is relative to the interpreter (p.87).

### Out of Time: Elisha – Composite and Whole

When handling narrative most readers will attempt to relate the order of textual presentation to a temporal sequence of events.<sup>110</sup> The order of the text is presumed to reflect the temporal experience in the world.<sup>111</sup> As van Wolde notes, ‘Our modern and western chronological arrangement is understood as universal and logical, thus reflecting the reader’s need to create causal relationships between previous elements (cause) and later elements (effect).’<sup>112</sup> However, texts may be organised by relations other than causal or temporal. They may also be arranged as collections, problem and solution, comparison, or description.<sup>113</sup> Cassuto already noted that when viewed according to the customs of ‘European literatures,’ the order and sequencing of the Hebrew Bible may seem strange. What is odd to the Western reader may be a perfectly natural arrangement in the ancient Near East since ‘the conception of order may vary among different peoples and in different periods’.<sup>114</sup> In some cases, readers seeking to build coherence from a chronological foundation will be disappointed by a biblical text not arranged in such a fashion.

With respect to Elisha it is clear that from his entrance upon the narrative stage (1 Kgs 19.19-21) to his inauguration (2 Kgs 2) to his death (2 Kgs 13.14-22), the stories move in a manner which is only broadly chronological. In one of the few attempts to discern some rationale for the present order of the stories, Rofé argues that the

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<sup>110</sup> Perry, ‘Literary Dynamics,’ 38. The problem approached from the biblical author’s point of view is presented by S. Talmon, ‘The Presentation of Synchronicity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative,’ *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 28 (1978) 9-26. T. Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 38: ‘There is a sense in which in the world of texts there is no one single time. The overall structure of a text appears to allow for the possibility of there being a plurality of distinct temporal levels or dimensions.’

<sup>111</sup> van Wolde, ‘Creation of Coherence,’ 167.

<sup>112</sup> van Wolde, ‘Creation of Coherence,’ 167.

<sup>113</sup> B. J. F. Meyer and G. E. Rice, ‘The Interaction of Reader Strategies and the Organisation of the Text,’ *Text* 2 (1982) 155-92 (156-57).

<sup>114</sup> U. Cassuto, ‘The Sequence and Arrangement of the Biblical Sections,’ in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, vol. I, Bible, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1973), 1-6 (1).

construction of this *vita* is not chronological but ‘mainly according to the typical biblical manner of associative order, i.e., arrangement by external associations, such as similarity of words or phrases.’<sup>115</sup> Another model of coherence creation must be adopted in order to build coherence with these narratives. A strictly chronological perspective must be abandoned.<sup>116</sup>

Coherence has been viewed variously as the establishment of a discourse topic, a global intention, or a mental representation. We are not interested in adjudicating between them. These three aspects are not mutually exclusive since they emphasise the various facets of coherence within a communicative event: message (discourse topic), producer (global intention), and receiver (mental representation).<sup>117</sup> We will view coherence then as the establishment of a discourse topic (what the text is ‘about’) and an underlying global intention (how is the text functioning?) with which a reader creates a mental representation.

So what of the call for more objective criteria by which to measure coherence? Unfortunately, there is no set of objective criteria to which an appeal can be made. As Hirsch has noted, there do not appear to be any absolute standards by which one coherent reading may be judged against another. Narrative context plays a large role: *‘It is necessary to establish that the context invoked is the most probable context.* Only then, in relation to an established context, can we judge that one reading is

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<sup>115</sup> Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 49. Rofé entitles this section ‘The Arrangement of the Elisha Narratives’ and provides plausible set of relations between stories based on words and phrases. For the most part these are merely lexical. For narrative construction in Kings see Long, *1 Kings*, 19-25. For a more general treatment on connections in biblical narrative see H. van Dyke Paranak, ‘Transitional Techniques in the Bible,’ *JBL* 102 (1983) 525-548; id., ‘Oral typesetting. Some uses of biblical structure.’ *Biblica* 62 (1981) 153-68.

<sup>116</sup> A similar position is held by the conservative scholar E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960) who states that the miracles of 3.1-8.15 are arranged ‘according to their nature rather than in a strictly chronological order’ (p.196).

<sup>117</sup> Perhaps Giora would have the most trouble with our making her ‘discourse topic’ a text-based notion. However, it is justified in view of her admission that cohesion functions to mark and identify the discourse topic and it is cohesion that is the most text based element (‘What’s a Coherent Text?’, 26).

more coherent than another.<sup>118</sup> However, coherence, or non-coherence for that matter, is not merely a subjective or even individualistic phenomenon. The expectations of interpreters, particularly interpreters within a given community, also play a part and these expectations may converge to such an extent that it is valid to speak of a community expectation.<sup>119</sup> The same could be said of the producer(s) of a text. The possibility that a text is composite need not prevent us from struggling to make sense of it. The reader is an active participant in an attempt to weave various points of view 'into a coherent picture'.<sup>120</sup> Highlighting the role of the interpreter(s) in the production of coherence is not the same as placing those same interpreter(s) alongside the author(s) and/or redactor(s) of Kings in giving 'meaning' to the Elisha narratives; it is authors who create texts (and meaning), and while readers may do a lot to-and-with those texts, the reader is not co-author.<sup>121</sup>

It remains for us to adopt a model that will aid in the assessment of coherence in the treatment of 2 Kgs 2-8. This model must enable the creation of unity in diversity, reflecting the disparate quality of the stories while leaving open the possibility of a unified image.<sup>122</sup> Thus it must also enable the whole of 2 Kgs 2-8 to be set out before us much like a painting. While it is undeniable that 'texts pass through time' and it is likewise undeniable that a painting cannot distinguish between the 'story-time' and

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<sup>118</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 1967), 238. (author's emphasis).

<sup>119</sup> K. Hatakeyama, J. S. Petöfi, E. Sözer, 'Text, Connexity, Cohesion, Coherence,' in E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> Berlin, *Poetics*, 82; See also R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> M. Langleben, 'A Long Way to the Full Interpretation,' in E. Sözer (ed.), *Text Connexity*, 106-37 (108). See the excellent treatment of the hermeneutical issues in K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1998). This debate, of course, is ongoing. A discussion with respect to biblical studies is found in P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 37-76. Particularly noteworthy for our purposes is the section on the problem of an anonymous author, 61-68.

<sup>122</sup> The importance of such an attempt is apparent from Culley's comment: 'I have no simple metaphor or analogy to offer that would indicate how one might picture a text that is traditional and composite, in which both coherence and tension are important features' (*Themes*, 44).

the 'discourse time' as a narrative can, it is also true that biblical narrative can be likened to verbal representational art.<sup>123</sup>

We believe that T. Collins has provided a useful artistic model in his redactional study that may enable us to bring together diverse material into a single representation. Collins explores the redaction of the Latter Prophets including the northern prophetic narratives.<sup>124</sup> He concludes that a composite literary image – a 'prophetic metaphor' – was created in Isaiah, the minor prophets, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the Elijah/Elisha stories.<sup>125</sup> In his treatment Collins relies upon the work of the literary critic N. Frye according to whom the monarch represents for his or her subjects the 'unity of their society in an individual form.'<sup>126</sup> For Collins, the prophetic metaphor ultimately replaced the 'bankrupt royal metaphor' once unifying king and people: 'Thus the servant-prophet becomes a new model for the servant-Israel, showing the people how they should respond to their renewed call after the exile. The prophet is a living sign of what the ideal Israel should be.'<sup>127</sup> However, this prophetic metaphor arises out of diverse material and its 'disjointed character' stems from the writer's technique:

They adopted a method of composition that had much in common with the modern art form of collage, in which the juxtaposition of varied, even dissimilar items is cultivated as a matter of style. From close range there appears to be little organization or plan to the work. The unified vision only becomes apparent when we step back and take a broader more impressionistic view.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> On the distinction between 'story-time' and 'discourse-time' see S. Chatman, 'What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa) in W. J. T. Mitchell, *On Narrative* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago, 1981), 117-36 (118). 'Story-time' is the time actually covered by the narrative while 'discourse-time' concerns the manner in which events are presented (flashback, flashforward etc.). See also W. J. Martin, "'Dischronologized" Narrative in the Old Testament,' in *IOSOT Congress Volume, Rome 1968*, VTSup 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 179-86. Martin has a discussion of 'narrative order' and 'chronological order' with respect to 1 Kgs 18.1-7. The idea of biblical narrative as representational art is found in V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1994), 63-68.

<sup>124</sup> T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books*, The Biblical Seminar 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

<sup>125</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 180.

<sup>126</sup> Frye, *The Great Code*, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 180.

<sup>128</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 29-30.

T. L. Brodie claims that to date no one has done for the Elijah-Elisha narratives what has been done for Judges, viz., ‘rescue it from alleged fragmentation and show the coherence of the present text.’<sup>129</sup> While the present study has some affinities with the attempt to ‘show coherence’ its goals are much more modest. Basically it is an attempt to answer the question of narrative function: What are the Elisha narratives ‘doing’ in Kings? Of course a host of other questions must be addressed in our exegetical treatment. We are not interested in building an image of the prophet from a distance only. It will be important to provide a close reading of these texts before stepping back to gain the bigger picture and therefore we want to rely on both linguistics and poetics. It is clear from the earlier discussion that coherence is not simply a textual feature waiting to be discovered. It is an image waiting to be constructed. Neither is the ‘fragmentation’ of the Elisha stories merely alleged. It is this very fragmentation which has thus far prevented more holistic readings. This is where the model of collage may prove useful because in 2 Kgs 2-8 we have the combining of fragmentary views of Elisha, each building up an image, a prophetic metaphor. The prophet is variously portrayed from multiple perspectives: now meeting the needs of widows; now challenging kings; now raising the dead or healing lepers; now saving Israel from destruction. Within this collection of stories kings are ill, dying, unnamed, and impotent, while the prophet is portrayed as the ‘chariots and horsemen of Israel’, meeting the needs of common people. It will be interesting to see whether the idea of a ‘royal-metaphor-replaced-by-prophetic-metaphor’ plays any part in these stories. The task will not be an easy one.

Alongside the expectation of consistent continuity, the reader expects a ‘good literary text’ to resist and surprise him, to create difficulties and delays in discovering its coherence, in recognizing the frames relevant to it. The reader, then, ‘pulls’ the text towards a linking and organizing reading, but the text is supposed to put up a struggle and display disconnections and non-sequiturs to

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<sup>129</sup> T. L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), x.

be overcome only by a special effort. Only in this manner does it avoid being schematic, creating, instead, a sense of uniqueness.<sup>130</sup>

We may expect Elisha to put up a good fight, but in the end this is to be welcomed.

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<sup>130</sup> Perry, 'Literary Dynamics,' 50 n.10.

## CHAPTER 3

### ESTABLISHING THE NARRATIVE CONTEXTS (2 KINGS 1-2)

#### Introduction

We observed in chapter one a range of scholarship (commentaries, Old Testament introductions, monographs, articles) highlighting the variations of form and content associated with the Elisha narratives and some of the difficulties involved in reading them as a unified text. If we were to throw these stories into a hat, pull them out randomly, and piece them together in the order in which we extracted them, would it make a difference? Is the text randomly spliced together such that it really makes little difference whether, for example, the story of the floating axe-head is placed in its present position after the story of Naaman, or before it? One of the assumptions of this study is that it does make a difference: shifting 2 Kgs 6:1-7 as a unit would leave us with the same pericope but a different textual organism.

As was stated in the previous chapter the quality of a supposed coherent reading is closely linked with its context. In order for the reader to judge the interpretation set forth here it will be necessary to establish the narrative environment in which these stories are placed.<sup>1</sup> It is also important to point out that there is likely more than one coherent reading of the Elisha narratives. Any exploration of coherence in 2 Kings must take into consideration the important themes within the narrative.<sup>2</sup> By way of background the prophet Elijah, after the dramatic contest on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18.16-46), is told by YHWH to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. It is in these three that we find figureheads for three important features, narrative threads if you will, that wind their way through the northern prophetic narratives. Admittedly, such a

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<sup>1</sup> Hirsch Jr., *Validity*, 238.

<sup>2</sup> There is confusion on the use of the terms 'motif' and 'theme' (see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 96 n.6). He describes a 'theme' as 'an idea which is part of the value-system of the narrative' (p.95) while 'motif' describes a 'concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object' recurring through a narrative. P. Satterthwaite, 'The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2-8,' *TynBul* 49 (1998) 1-28 calls these 'narrative strands' (p.3). We rely, with some adjustments, upon Satterthwaite's major contextual headings.

perspective is a simplification, but keeping these characters in mind may be helpful as a way of grasping the narrative contexts.

### The destruction of Ahab's line and the end of Baal worship

First, the Elisha stories are set within the context of a larger prophetic conflict involving the house of Ahab and the Baal worship that Ahab is purported to have established (1 Kgs 16.31-33). YHWH's command to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha is followed by the rather general statement that any who escape (הַנִּמְלָט) Hazael's sword will be put to death (יָמִית) by Jehu's and those escaping Jehu's sword will be put to death by Elisha (1 Kgs 19.17). It is only in light of the events on Mt. Carmel and Mt. Horeb that we associate Ahab, Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal with those who will be 'put to death'. How are we to interpret the statement that the ones who escape will be put to death by Elisha? Nowhere in the ensuing narratives does Elisha wield a sword and put to death those fleeing the wrath of Hazael and Jehu. Does the narrator wish us to assume that their pogroms were so complete, so devastatingly thorough, that there was no need for narrative evidence of Elisha performing this task?<sup>3</sup>

The general statement gains specificity later when we learn of the destruction of the house of Ahab as well as the horrific end that Jezebel will face. This is foretold by YHWH and precipitated by Ahab's seizing of property belonging to Naboth (1 Kgs 21.21-24). Ultimately the first of our narrative threads reaches its climax in the purge of Jehu as the Omride dynasty (2 Kgs 9.21-26), Baal worship (2 Kgs 10.18-28), and Jezebel (2 Kgs 9.30-37) are brought to a chilling end.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is common for scholars to hold that the call of Elisha (1 Kgs 19.19-21) was part of an original 'Elisha cycle'. See Robinson, *Kings*, 1:223; Long, *1 Kings* 204; S. DeVries, *1 Kings*, WBC 12 (Waco: Word, 1985), 238-39.

<sup>4</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 3.

The above discussion merely serves to reinforce the view held by many that 2 Kgs 9 is part of the Dtr history, but that the bulk of the Elisha narratives have very little to do with this first narrative thread. This position is supported by the fact that there are only two other explicit statements concerning the destruction of Ahab's line or the end of Baal worship and each of these occurs within 2 Kgs 3, another chapter viewed as integrated into the Deuteronomist's history by some scholars. We are told in 2 Kgs 3.2 that Jehoram 'did evil in the eyes of YHWH only not like his father and his mother' and that he removed the *מִצְבַּת הַבַּעַל* made by Ahab his father. The second explicit reference is found at 3.13 where Elisha tells Jehoram to take his problems 'to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother.'<sup>5</sup>

This statement draws our attention to the various decisions made while reading the story in order to make sense of Elisha's statement. We automatically assume the referents are Ahab and Jezebel. Also in spite of Elijah's plea to 'let none of them escape' (*אִישׁ אֶל-יִמְלַט מֵהֶם*), 1 Kgs 18.40a), we must assume that some of the prophets of Baal did escape from the Kishon Valley, since Elisha in 3.13 tells Jehoram to take his problems to these very prophets. We may also hold out the possibility that the large contingent of prophets dining at Jezebel's table (1 Kgs 18.19) were not present during the confrontation at Mt. Carmel. Finally, if all of the prophets of Baal were in fact slaughtered in the Kishon Valley we may conjecture a revitalisation of their ranks.

### The war with Aram and the return of external foes

Another more explicit contextual theme, particularly in 2 Kgs 5-8, is the threat from Aram.<sup>6</sup> The involvement of Aram in the affairs of the northern and southern

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<sup>5</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives.' 3-4. However, we will argue below that there are subtle references to Ahab in 2 Kgs 6:32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 128

kingdoms is mentioned as early as the war between Baasha and Asa (1 Kgs 15.16-22). At the end of 1 Kings it is the aimless<sup>7</sup> arrow of an anonymous Aramean that mortally wounds Ahab in a battle at Ramoth Gilead (22.34-38) and it is a weapon of Aram that nearly spells the end of Ahab's son Joram (יֹרָם) in a battle with Hazael (2 Kgs 8.28-29).<sup>8</sup> Why does each of the battles at Ramoth Gilead stress the alliances between Israel and Judah in their attempts to engage the Aramean foe? Why does Judah join in these conflicts that appear to be a northern problem?<sup>9</sup> These are questions that we need to keep in mind as we proceed.

Elisha predicts the harm that Hazael will inflict upon the בני ישראל (2 Kgs 8.12) and yet we are left wondering whether this destruction will fall to both northern and southern kingdoms or to the North alone. Does בני ישראל here refer collectively to 'all Israel' or the northern kingdom only? Given the damage inflicted by Jehu on both kingdoms in the chapters following Elisha's words to Hazael this is an apt question. While widespread throughout Kings, the phrase בני ישראל is conspicuous by its absence from the Elisha narratives occurring only at 2 Kgs 8.12 and 13.5. Thus, while the 'sons of the prophets' seem to be flourishing we hear little from the 'sons of Israel'.<sup>10</sup> Likewise the phrase כל ישראל while rather frequent in 1 Kings (23x) is found in 2 Kings only within the frame of the northern prophetic narratives (3.6; 9.14; 10.21).<sup>11</sup> The collapse of identities of northern and southern kingdom suggests

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<sup>7</sup> The anonymous warrior (1 Kgs 22.34//2 Chr 18.33) fires the arrow (לְתוֹמוֹ) 'in his simplicity' according to Burney, *Notes*, 257 who points to the only other occurrence at 2 Sam. 15.11. *BDB*:1070, s.v. תָּם suggests 'without definite aim'. R. Coggins, 'On Kings and Disguises,' *JSOT* 50 (1991) 55-62 rightly argues that 1 Kgs 22 highlights YHWH's control over events and not luck or chance: 'Like the witch of Endor, the Aramaean archers are merely the instruments through which the result is achieved [i.e., Micaiah's prophesy], but nevertheless instruments of a will that cannot be thwarted by human attempts at disguise' (58).

<sup>8</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 4. In due course we will address the issue of the names of the kings of Israel and Judah.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs 22.3; 2 Kgs 8.28.

<sup>10</sup> Within the northern prophetic narratives we find בני ישראל elsewhere at 1 Kgs 18.20; 19.10, 14; 20.15, 27, 29; 21.26.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that the end of Baal worship in 2 Kgs 10 coincides with the end of כל ישראל in the narrative of 2 Kgs.

‘that the expression may have nuances of a collective meaning’.<sup>12</sup> The importance of this discussion will become clear in our treatment of 2 Kgs 3. This raises the wider question not simply of Israel’s conflict with Aram, but the function of enemies in Kings generally and the Elisha narratives particularly. For example, we read twice of Moab’s rebellion after the death of Ahab (2 Kgs 1.1; 3.5). The repetition of this rebellion in the face of Ahaziah’s apostasy provides ‘an image of looming trouble’.<sup>13</sup>

### Miracle stories, the loss of royal identity and the unified kingdoms

We must also consider the miracle tales which are primary constituents of the narrative and which raise the greatest set of challenges to any attempt at a coherent reading. This is so because the miracles themselves appear so trivial and because they seem to have little relevance to their context. At one moment we find Elisha among the political movers of the day only to commence a new story in which he is feeding or healing common folk.<sup>14</sup> It is such juxtapositions that create problems for a coherent reading. By most accounts the miracle stories ‘appear to be concerned much more with authenticating the role of Elisha as a model Mosaic prophet who plays a central role in the overthrow of the Omrides.’<sup>15</sup>

It may seem odd that miracle stories are found here in conjunction with the anonymity of the king of Israel and the unifying of the kingdoms. It may seem even

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<sup>12</sup> J. Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: the Past as a Project of Social Identity*, JSOTSup 272 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 184. The statement is made in the context of a discussion of 2 Kgs 8.12.

<sup>13</sup> R. L. Cohn, *2 Kings, BERIT OLAM: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Satterthwaite, ‘Elisha Narratives,’ 5. Apart from the miraculous deeds of 2.19-25, most of the wonder-working material is found within 4.1-8.15. C. Begg, ‘Elisha’s Great Deeds According to Josephus,’ *Henech* 28 (1996) 69-110 remarks that this section ‘constitutes a rather distinct section, focused as it is on the memorable words and deeds of the prophet Elisha’ (p.69). G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 1965) 2:27 states: ‘Nowhere in the Old Testament are so many miracles crowded in to so small a space, and nowhere is such open pleasure taken in the miraculous, or such sheer delight shown at the repeated and astonishing proofs of the prophet’s *charisma*.’

<sup>15</sup> K. W. Whitelam, ‘Elisha,’ *ABD* 2:472.

more odd that it is discussed as a contextual theme. As is well known, the anonymity of the king of Israel is considered a distinctive feature of this group of stories.<sup>16</sup> As hinted at in the previous section the narrative provides explicit and not so explicit clues that the northern and southern kingdoms are indistinguishable. It is in the context of royal anonymity and confused identity that the miracle stories of Elisha are placed and it is from within such a context that they must be interpreted.

Each of the three characters anointed in 1 Kgs 19.15-17 plays an important role in the themes that form the background for the Elisha narratives: the destruction of Ahab's house and Baal worship (Jehu); the Aramean threat (Hazeal); and the miracle stories and the loss of anonymity (Elisha). These contextual elements are bound together in ways that are not immediately evident to the reader. There remain under these contextual headings a host of related features which need to be explored further. Among these are: political alliance; peace; healing; provision of food, water, and other basics like flour and oil; and land granting/loss. Before turning to the exegesis of the narratives we must set the immediate narrative context for chapters 2-8.

### *2 Kings 1: A Fading King Prepares for a Rising Prophet*

The following look at 2 Kgs 1 is an attempt to get at the larger issues of the chapter rather than a full exegetical treatment. Ahab has died from wounds suffered at Ramoth-Gilead and his son Ahaziah assumes the throne. He also walks in the ways of his father and mother and in the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat (1 Kgs 22.54).<sup>17</sup> His actions incur YHWH's wrath and so we are not too surprised to learn that he has suffered an injury from which he may not recover (2 Kgs 1.2). In searching for an

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<sup>16</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 3 notes that the narrator presents Ahaziah in 1 Kgs 22.54 as 'a classic apostate following in the footsteps of his Baal-worshipping parents, Ahab and Jezebel.'

answer to his question, ‘Will I recover from this illness?’ (אם־אֶתְּיָה מִחֲלִי זֶה) 2 Kgs 1.2bβ) Ahaziah seeks not YHWH but Baal-Zebub of Ekron, a fact which does not sit well with YHWH, who challenges Ahaziah with a question of his own. Three times, and in the mouths of various characters, we hear an accusation couched in the form of a question.

First, Elijah is instructed (by the angel of YHWH) to greet Ahaziah’s messengers:

הַמַּבְלִי אֵין־אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם הַלְכִים לְדָרֵשׁ בְּבַעַל זְבוּב אֱלֹהֵי עֶקְרוֹן

‘Is it because there is no God at all<sup>18</sup> in Israel that you are going to seek Baal-Zebub god of Ekron?’ (2 Kgs 1.3b).

The implied accusation of this question is confirmed by the oracle of judgment which follows:

וְלָכֵן כִּה־אָמַר יְהוָה הַמַּטָּה אֲשֶׁר־עָלִיתָ שָׁם לֹא־תֵרָד מִמֶּנָּה כִּי מוֹת תָּמוּת

Therefore thus says YHWH, ‘From the bed upon which you have gone up you shall not come down for you shall certainly die’ (2 Kgs 1.4).

The text never describes the actual meeting between Elijah and the messengers of Ahaziah. Instead the meeting is mediated through the report of the messengers to the king. Like the king, the reader is not privy to the specifics of the meeting but only hears from the messengers the vital question and the judgment which results. The prophetic name is found in v.4 and revealed in v.8b both before and after the intervening dialogue between Ahaziah and his messengers (vv.5-8).<sup>19</sup> When Ahaziah wants to know why the search party has returned, they inform him of their meeting with ‘a man’ and once again ask YHWH’s accusatory question followed by the judgment oracle:

הַמַּבְלִי אֵין־אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה שְׁלַח לְדָרֵשׁ בְּבַעַל זְבוּב אֱלֹהֵי עֶקְרוֹן

‘Is there no God at all in Israel that you<sup>20</sup> are sending to seek Baal-Zebub god of Ekron?’ (2 Kgs 1.6aβ).

<sup>18</sup> See Williams §394 and GKC §152y for the double negative which adds emphasis. Note that the *pataḥ* of the interrogative ה reflects the MT of vv. 3, 6, 16. There are times when the short vowel is kept in an open syllable (J-M §102 l).

<sup>19</sup> J. T. Walsh, ‘The Elijah Cycle: A Synchronic Approach’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1982), 129.

<sup>20</sup> Notice that with the use of the singular personal pronoun (cf. 1.3b) the messengers have

Finally, Elijah himself confronts Ahaziah with the message from YHWH with a slightly different emphasis. In the earlier instances Ahaziah is asked a subtle and accusatory question which examines his present motivation for seeking Baal-Zebub. The final instance reverses the emphasis bringing to the fore the reality of Ahaziah's past actions (יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתָּ) and YHWH's anger with him is nearly palpable in the difficult syntax.

יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתָּ מַלְאָכִים לְדַרְשׁ בְּבַעַל זְבוּב אֱלֹהֵי עֶקְרוֹן  
הַמִּבְלִי אֵין־אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְדַרְשׁ בְּדַבְרֹוֹ

'Because you have sent messengers to seek Baal-Zebub god of Ekron...  
Is it because there is no God at all in Israel to seek by his word?' (2 Kgs 1.16).

Standing upon the entryway into the Elisha narrative, the tri-fold presentation of this question delivers a constant reminder that there is a wounded king of Israel who seeks Baal-Zebub for answers rather than YHWH through his prophet. The death of Ahaziah follows as surely as YHWH has spoken through Elijah. The pattern of the deathly ill king seeking to ascertain whether or not he will survive is unique to Kings.<sup>21</sup> In fact, this 'type-scene' is found in Kings in association with each major prophet.<sup>22</sup> It is not that this particular monarch is unwell. Ahaziah is merely indicative of an institution which has fallen from some height, a fact with which we are immediately presented.<sup>23</sup> Because Ahaziah has no son, Jehoram follows him to the throne in the second year of the Judahite king Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat (1.17). It is important to keep in mind the narrative presentation of two Jehorams ruling in their respective kingdoms at the same time.

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distanced themselves from the king.

<sup>21</sup> R. L. Cohn, 'Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: the Case of the Dying Monarch,' *CBO* 47 (1985) 603-616. Cohn notes that the Chronicler does not use the pattern (p.604).

<sup>22</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 4: Ahijah 1 Kgs 14.1-18; Elijah 2 Kgs 1.1-18; Elisha 2 Kgs 8.7-15; Isaiah 2 Kgs 20.1-11.

<sup>23</sup> Walsh, 'Elijah Cycle,' 134-35 notes the importance of the 'high and low' motif for the story as indicated by the verbs ירד (12x) עלה (8x) קום (2x) as well as בַּעֲלִיתוֹ (v.2); עַל־רֹאשׁ הַהָר; וַיִּפֹּל (v.9b); וַיִּפֹּל (v.2); וַיִּכְרַע עַל־בְּרִכּוֹ (v.13). Twice the king is told by Elijah that he will not 'come down' from his bed and twice the king commands Elijah to 'come down' (p.136).

The story of Ahaziah, followed by a confusing and some would say confused regnal formula, is told just prior to the narrative which relates the replacement of Elijah with Elisha.<sup>24</sup> Why? What is the relationship of chapter one to the prior stories and those that will follow? For the present we may highlight several important points. First, as with his father before him, and his brother who will follow him, Ahaziah is something of a weakling. In a discussion of 2 Kings 5 Cohn rightly observes: 'As elsewhere in the Elijah-Elisha cycle, the king of Israel is depicted to be ineffectual, powerless, the tool of his wife (1 Kings xxi), his allies (1 Kings xxii) or the prophet (2 Kings i). In fact, the king now fades from the scene and the prophet assumes control.'<sup>25</sup> As we will see this statement is true not only for the particulars of 2 Kings 5, but for the Elisha narratives more generally: the king is portrayed as ineffective and the prophet Elisha takes upon himself the prerogatives and duties properly ascribed to a king.

Secondly, Elijah is portrayed as a prophet in control of the events in 2 Kgs 1; and if we are not convinced by the display of pyrotechnics on Mt. Carmel, then perhaps the second display of אֵשׁ-אֱלֹהִים will convince us that he is אֵשׁ-אֱלֹהִים (1 Kgs 1.12b). Although Elijah refuses to obey the king's order that he come down (רָדָה, 1.9b; 11b), the fire is not so reticent (וַתִּרְדַּד, 1.10b; 12b) and like the earlier sacrifice in the water-filled trench, it consumes (אָכַל cf. 1 Kgs 18.38a; 2 Kgs 1.10.b, 12b) its object. The unhealthy king, who should have known where to find the word of YHWH and instead seeks Baal-Zebub, is contrasted with the genuine leader of Israel: a prophet pre-eminently in control of the situation.<sup>26</sup>

C. Conroy has recently made a strong case for the integration of 1 Kgs 16.34 within its present literary context. This verse establishes a narrative analogy between

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<sup>24</sup> Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 294 observed that the story relating Elisha's succession of Elijah is placed after Ahaziah's death but before Jehoram's introduction in 3.1-3. See the discussion in A. R. Green, 'Regnal Formulas in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Books of Kings,' *JNES* 42 (1983) 167-80.

<sup>25</sup> R. L. Cohn, 'Form and Perspective in 2 Kings V,' *VT* 33 (1983) 171-184 (176).

<sup>26</sup> Cohn, 'Convention,' 609.

Hiel of Bethel, who lost his eldest and youngest sons in the rebuilding of Jericho, and Ahab who erected an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal which he had built in Samaria (1 Kgs 16.32-33).<sup>27</sup> The evidence adduced by Conroy involves a series of 'thematic and lexical contacts' centred on the respective building projects along with the fact that these building projects were contrary to the will of YHWH.<sup>28</sup>

The particular relationship between 1 Kgs 16.34 and 2 Kgs 2.19-25 will be addressed below. Important for the present discussion of 2 Kgs 1.17 is the observation that Hiel and Ahab each loses two sons to untimely deaths.<sup>29</sup> In each case the loss is a fulfilment of the word of YHWH. Hiel's loss hearkens back to the curse found in Jos 6.26. According to 1 Kgs 16.34 this loss occurs כְּדָבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן. Similarly the death of each of Ahab's sons (Ahaziah at 1 Kgs 1.17; Jehoram at 2 Kgs 9.26) occurs as a fulfilment of YHWH's word.<sup>30</sup> Neither of these kings receives the usual burial notice given even those kings of Israel who die under sordid circumstances.<sup>31</sup> Both the prophets Elisha and Elijah are, each in his own way, implicated in the downfall of Ahab's doomed sons.

Indeed the death of both kings is associated in some way with these two prophets: Elijah uttered an oracle against Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1, and Elisha is presented as having instigated and legitimated Jehu's coup d'état in the course of which Jehoram was killed in 2 Kgs 9.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. Conroy, 'Hiel between Ahab and Elijah-Elisha: 1 Kgs 16,34 in Its Immediate Literary Context,' *Biblica* 77 (1996) 210-18.

<sup>28</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 212-13. Conroy notes that each figure is subject of the בנה along with three other verbs from the semantic field of 'construction'.

<sup>29</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 214.

<sup>30</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 215.

<sup>31</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 214 n.11. Here Conroy follows the detailed study of B. Halpern and D. S. Vanderfooft, 'The Editions of Kings in the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.E.,' *HUCA* 62 (1991) 179-244 (190-194).

<sup>32</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 215-16. We may be able to make this contextual argument for 1 Kgs 1 not only for the father Ahab, but for the mother Jezebel as well. First, we may compare and contrast the two women from Sidon: the widow of Zarephath and Jezebel. Each is involved with feeding prophets. Unlike the widow, Jezebel does not acknowledge that Elijah is a 'man of God', but instead wishes to kill him. Also like the widow, Jezebel has a son who becomes ill in association with the 'upper room'. The prophet raises the widow's son from his bed, but proclaims the death of Jezebel's son, 'by the word of YHWH.' See J. Siebert-Hommes, 'The Widow of Zarephath and the Great Woman of Shunem: A Comparative Analysis of Two Stories,' in B. Becking and M. Dijkstra (eds.), *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific & Related Studies in Memory of Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes*, BIS

Much more must be said concerning the identity of kings and the place of Elisha. We will argue below that the confusion surrounding the names of the kings of Israel and Judah is a purposeful narrative technique, making light of Israel's kings and implicating the kings of Judah in the crimes of the northern kingdom. The prophet Elisha will, in the narratives that follow (chapters 4-8), take upon himself the responsibilities normally incumbent upon the king.

### 2 Kings 2: A New Leader in Israel

At the end of 2 Kings 1, Ahaziah is succeeded by Jehoram, an individual about which we are told virtually nothing. One of the important features of 2 Kgs 1 was the fact that a king of Israel sought knowledge not from YHWH through his prophet Elijah, but through Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron. Elijah was formerly told of 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal, but who and where are these individuals? Ahab, Jezebel, and their son Ahaziah, as those who have sought Baal, have not thought too highly of this Tishbite 'with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist' (2 Kgs 1.8).<sup>33</sup> Are we to assume that those described in 1 Kgs 19.18 as the ones whom YHWH will spare (השארתיה), the ones who have not kneeled (לא-כרעו) before Baal nor kissed him (לא-נישק), will think any more positively of YHWH's leaders?

### 2 Kings 2.1-6: Persistent prophets

The answer to this question is given in 2 Kings 2.<sup>34</sup> Elisha is introduced as the new leader of the sons of the prophets, a group associated almost exclusively with him in

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18 (Brill: Leiden/New York/Köln, 1996), 231-50 (231). Siebert-Hommes relies upon K. A. D. Smelik, 'The Literary Function of 1 Kgs 17, 8-24,' in C. Brekelmans and J. Lust (eds.), *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 239-243

<sup>33</sup> Recall that the messengers seeking *בְּעַל זְבוּב* (2 Kgs 1.6) actually find *בְּעַל שֵׁטֶר* (2 Kgs 1.8).

<sup>34</sup> This story has attracted a great deal of attention because the involvement of both Elijah and Elisha. There is debate about whether the story was originally part of the Elijah or Elisha cycle. Y. Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell Your Son..." *The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem:

the Hebrew Bible. In chapter 2 we meet for the first time, as a group, those who are called בני־הנביאים.<sup>35</sup> Repeated features, particularly the vertical motif present in the verbs ירד and עלה, the presence of ‘fifty’ in both stories as well as the repeated mention of Moab’s rebellion (2 Kgs 1.1; 3.5) surrounding the two chapters, encourage us to compare and contrast a monarchy that dismisses the prophetic word and concomitantly seeks other gods, with a group that, at least on the surface, appears to hold the prophetic word and YHWH in high regard.<sup>36</sup>

This is exemplified first in the person of Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah. The narrative commences with the nearly title-like designation that the events occurred when YHWH was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a storm (וַיְהִי בַּהֲעֵלֹת יְהוָה אֶת־אֱלִיָּהוּ בַּסַּעֲרָה הַשְּׁמַיִם), v. 1).<sup>37</sup> This is the first instance of ירד within 2 Kings, a form which functions ‘to introduce a new element into the main narrative thread so that that element becomes an integral and important part of the account.’<sup>38</sup>

We observed in the previous chapter a series of three-fold repetitions which, we argued, highlighted an important feature within the narrative. As Elijah interacts

Magnes Press, 1991), 73, claims that the chapter is ‘dedicated to the figure of Elisha.’ See pages 73-79, where Zakovitch makes comparisons between the Elisha narratives and stories associated with Moses. M. A. O’Brien, ‘The Portrayal of Prophets in 2 Kings 2,’ *AusBr* 46 (1998) 1-16 asserts that ‘there has been no study of this chapter in its own right as an example of OT narrative art’ (p.1). However he neglects the studies of J. R. Lundbom, ‘Elijah’s Chariot Ride,’ *JJS* 24 (1973) 39-50 and T. R. Hobbs, ‘2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose,’ *SR* 13 (1984) 327-34.

<sup>35</sup> We find the בני־הנביאים mentioned at 1 Kgs 20.35; 2 Kgs 2.3, 5, 7, 15; 4.1, 38; 5.22; 6.1; 9.1. The first instance (1 Kgs 20.35) concerns one of the sons of the prophets but not the group as a whole. In several other verses there are קְלֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים (1 Kgs 19.1; 22.10//2 Chr 18.9; 1 Kgs 22.12//2 Chr 18.11).

<sup>36</sup> For ירד (2 Kgs 1.4, 6, 9, 10[2x], 11, 12[2x], 14, 15[2x], 16; 2 Kgs 2.2); עלה (2 Kgs 1.3, 4, 6[2x], 7, 9, 13, 16; 2 Kgs 2.1, 11, 23[4x]); חמשים (2 Kgs 1.9[2x], 10[3x], 11[2x], 12[2x], 13[4x], 14[2x]; 2 Kgs 2.7, 16, 17); נפלה מעליו (2 Kgs 2.13aβ). Lundbom, ‘Chariot Ride,’ 46 also adds ‘fire’ to the motifs of ‘up and down’ and the ‘50 men.’

<sup>37</sup> Gropp, ‘Progress and Cohesion,’ 183-212. Gropp, noting also Gen 19.29, claims that this is a ‘striking phenomenon’ in which a clause or clause-sequence provides an abstract for the whole narrative (p.201). That the author makes no effort to maintain the suspense of this event, is, for Rofé, one of the reasons to view Elisha’s fate as more important than Elijah’s (*Prophetic Stories*, 44).

<sup>38</sup> A. Niccacci, *Syntax*, 48. M. Eskhult, *Studies*, 30 states: ‘The use of introductory wayhī ‘and it came about’ is an often employed device in classical Hebrew narration to prevent another clause constituent than the verb from occupying initial position. In this way a two-clause sentence arises: wayhī + adverbial element, followed by a connective clause introduced by wayyiqtol.’ This is the pattern observed in the opening verse of 2 Kgs 2.

three times with captains of Ahaziah, each with his fifty men (vv. 9, 11, 13), so also in chapter 2 Elijah interacts three times with his future replacement Elisha. The narrative charts the progress of the prophetic duo as they travel from Gilgal to Bethel, Bethel to Jericho, and Jericho to the Jordan. Each time Elijah's command (שב־נא פה vv. 2, 4, 6) is met with firm resistance from Elisha by way of an oath:

חַי־יְהוָה וְחַי־נַפְשְׁךָ אִם־אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ

'By the life of YHWH and by the life of your soul'<sup>39</sup> I will not forsake you' (vv.2.aβ, 4aβ, 6aβ).

The previous chapter portrayed Ahaziah as a king who did not seek the prophetic word of Elijah, but here Elisha refuses to let his master go, to the point of swearing on oath. The inseparable nature of the relationship is highlighted in the last of the repetitive interactions between Elijah and Elisha where we told וַיִּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם (2.6b). This is noteworthy first because from the start of the narrative the removal of Elijah from Elisha has been the issue. Second, שנים will be a key word in the narrative.<sup>40</sup>

However, Elijah is not the only one to be persistently hounded; so is his understudy. After each of the two first incidents between Elijah and Elisha, the sons of the prophets from nearby the various locales (Bethel, Jericho) come out to meet Elisha with the question:

הֲיָדַעְתָּ כִּי הַיּוֹם יִקַּח אֶת־אֲדֹנָיְךָ מֵעַל רֹאשְׁךָ

'Do you know that today YHWH is taking your master from over your head?' (vv.3.aβ, 5aβ).

Each time the prophet Elisha responds:

גַּם־אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי הַחַשׁוּ

'I know it also. Be quiet' (vv.3b, 5b).

<sup>39</sup> On the oath formula see M. Greenberg, 'The Hebrew Oath Particle *HAY/HĒ*,' *JBL* 76 (1957) 34-39. Greenberg has noted that חַי appears before the Tetragram while חַי is found before words not representing the deity (p.35). The Targums distinguish between these two particles (Greenberg, 36). This is maintained at 2 Kgs 2.2 (קַיִם הוּא יְיָ וְחַיִּי נַשְׁךָ), while the LXX renders both particles with ζῆ. Greenberg concludes that the particle is the noun, 'life' in the construct and argues that the participial rendering 'as truly as X lives' is not valid (p.39).

<sup>40</sup> Maeijer, *Second Elijah*, 14-15.

There is a persistence in both Elisha's unwillingness to leave his master, and the sons of the prophets as they twice question Elisha. In both Elisha's pursuit of Elijah, and the pursuit of Elisha by the sons of the prophets, subordinates respond to prophetic presence in a manner markedly different from Ahaziah's disregard for YHWH's prophets.

### 2 Kings 2.7-14: Crossing the Jordan

The narrative slows down as the stage is set for YHWH to remove Elijah. In previous instances, the introduction of the sons of the prophets occurs via the more usual narrative structure *wayyiqtol* + subject. In the first instance at Bethel the sons of the prophets 'went forth' (וַיֵּצְאוּ, v.3) to meet Elisha, while in the second incident at Jericho they 'drew near' (וַיִּגְשׁוּ, v.5). In the final incident there is no mention of Elisha speaking to the sons of the prophets at all and the group of fifty is highlighted from the standpoint of syntax. The sentence is constructed with the *waw* + subject + *qatal* + *wayyiqtol* (וַתִּקְרְאוּ אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים הַלְכוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ, v.7). These fifty prophetic sons are left observing at some unspecified distance near the Jordan and the initial clause in v.7 is related by way of background information to which the narrative will return in v.15 where a new section begins.<sup>41</sup> At the end of v.7 we are once again informed of the inseparable prophets (וַשְּׁנֵיהֶם עָמְדוּ עַל-הַיַּרְדֵּן).

In 2 Kgs 1.13-14 it was the third captain and his men who responded appropriately to Elijah. Besides syntax, are there any other indicators in the narrative that it is this final group of prophetic sons that also responds rightly to the prophet Elisha? Before this question can be answered the climax of this section must be examined. Here Elijah is taken up and Elisha assumes the mantle of leadership.

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<sup>41</sup> Note also the *qatal* followed by the *wayyiqtol* in verse 7 in order to indicate a pluperfect relationship. See S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* with a new introduction by W. R. Garr. The Biblical Resources Series (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans and Livonia, Mich.: Dove Booksellers, 1998), §2.16(9). Among a number of his examples Gen 2.2; 31.34 are similar to the present verse in that the *wayyiqtol* follows the *qatal*.

Fortunately, the narrator is kind enough to take us along on the other-worldly journey – there and back again – from one side of the Jordan to the other rather than leaving us to observe from a distance with the sons of the prophets.

The narrative action increases with the series of five *wayyiqtol* verbs in v.8. Elijah takes (וַיִּקַּח) his cloak rolls it up (וַיִּגְלֹם)<sup>42</sup> and strikes (וַיִּכֶה) the waters such that:

וַיִּחַצּוּ הַמַּיִם וְהַיַּבֵּשׁ וַיַּעֲבְרוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּחַרְבָּהּ

...they divided this way and that way and the two of them crossed over on dry ground (2 Kgs 2.8)

This verse is important for a number of reasons. First, although the prophets still cross over together (שְׁנֵיהֶם), the looming sense of ‘separation’ is made more explicit by the division (חֲצָה) of the waters. Second, this verb sequence will be repeated in the upcoming verses.

At the invitation of Elijah, Elisha asks for ‘a double share’ of his master’s spirit (v.9). Elisha’s request should not be too surprising given the recurrence of the keyword again (פִּי־שְׁנַיִם).<sup>43</sup> In this request, many commentators see a reflection of Deut 21.17 and Elisha’s desire to have the inheritance due the firstborn son. This seems a reasonable interpretation in light of the limited usage of the phrase within the Hebrew Bible.<sup>44</sup> However, Elisha may also recognise that if he cannot maintain physical contact with his master, perhaps he can share in his spiritual power. In any event, Elijah makes Elisha aware of the difficulty of his request and provides him with a condition, the fulfilment of which will reveal to him that his desire has been granted. It is only if Elisha ‘sees’ Elijah being taken that he will know that he has the spirit of Elijah.

The narrator does not keep us in suspense long as we near the climax of the story. The chariot of fire and horses of fire ‘divided between them’ (וַיִּפְרְדּוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם, 11aβ) as Elijah is removed literally from ‘over Elisha’s head’. The formal features of the

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<sup>42</sup> גִּלֵּם occurs only here in biblical Hebrew. Other occurrences of the root at Ezek 27.24; Ps 139.16.

<sup>43</sup> Maeijer, *Second Elijah*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> פִּי־שְׁנַיִם occurs also at Dt 17.6; 19.15; 21.17; Note again the connection with Zech 13.8.

language bring us to the very point of Elisha's perception and we are allowed with him to 'behold' (והנה, v.11a) the action. The vision is drawn out in v.12 with several participial forms heightening the sense of action and emotion as Elisha 'is seeing' (ראה) and crying out (מצעק)' at the departure of his mentor.

Elisha's cry, 'My father! my father! The chariotry and horsemen of Israel' (v.12), has proved a difficult interpretative question.<sup>45</sup> It will be necessary to come to some conclusion, however tentative, regarding this phrase as we move through the narratives since the statement may play some role in the discernment of coherence. We later encounter the theme of horses and chariots of fire (6.13-17) in a story of 'seeing' (6.18) and military threat, and the exact phrase אָבִי אָבִי רֶכֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפָרָשָׁיו once more in 2 Kgs 13.14.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the phrase brackets the Elisha narratives fore and aft with a thematic treatment more centrally located within chapter 6.

This cry should not be separated from Elisha's actions or the question which follows. At first Elisha 'sees', but then 'sees Elijah no longer' (v. 12aβ). Signifying the pain of that severed relationship, he tears his own clothes into two pieces (וַיִּקְרַעֵם לְשָׁנַיִם קָרְעִים) and only afterwards takes up the fallen mantle, all that remains of his master.

The prior actions of Elijah (v.8) are now repeated by Elisha in vv.13-14 albeit with increased narrative complexity. The sub-section is framed by occurrences of ראה: just as Elisha 'sees' Elijah (v.12a) and then takes up the symbol of his master,

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<sup>45</sup> For a detailed discussion see M. A. Beek, 'The Meaning of the Expression "The Chariots and the Horsemen of Israel" (II Kings ii 12),' *OTS* 17 (1972) 1-10.

<sup>46</sup> Beek holds that every prophet has a right to the title אָבִי אָבִי רֶכֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפָרָשָׁיו even if the prophet is not involved in the warfare of Israel ('Meaning,' 4). It seems odd that he should make this claim for every prophet irrespective of the prophet's connection to warfare, particularly since he argues that the phrase should be understood within a warfare context (p. 5). Gunkel, on the other hand, applies the title only to Elisha ['Elisha – the Successor of Elijah (2 Kings ii.1-18),' *ExpTim* 41 (1929-30) 182-86 (185)]. Elisha's narrative influence seems best served by the description of M. Tsevat: 'In the ninth century, when chariotry had become a prominent weapon in Israel, one so designated a man in whom one trusted for help and delivery' [*sic*] [M. Tsevat, 'YHWH ŠEBA'OT' in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav Publishing House/Dallas: Institute for Jewish Studies, 1980), 126].

so the sons of the prophets ‘see’ Elisha (וַיִּרְאוּהוּ, v.15a) and recognise that ‘the spirit of Elijah has rested upon Elisha’ (v.15aβ). Verses 13-14 manifest an interleaving quality in which narrative movement repeats information just given while highlighting central items.

A And Elisha sees...(v.12)

B And he took up (וַיִּקַּח) the robe of Elijah which had fallen from him

C And he returned (וַיָּשָׁב) and he stood (וַיַּעֲמֵד) by the edge of the Jordan

B' And he took (וַיִּקַּח) the robe of Elijah which had fallen from him

D And he struck the waters (וַיִּכֶה)

E And he said, ‘Where is YHWH God of Elijah now?’<sup>47</sup>

D' And he struck the waters (וַיִּכֶה)

F And they divided (וַיִּחְצְבוּ) this way and that

G And Elisha crossed over (וַיַּעֲבֹר)

A' And the sons of the prophets saw him...(v.15)

Several things may be noted here. First, the verbs are repeated in the order found in v.8 with the exception that Elisha does not roll (גִּלַּם) the robe as Elijah had done. Second, the repetitive clauses surround and emphasise the fact that Elisha now acts alone as he stands by the Jordan, as well as the question he asks regarding YHWH’s presence. The narrator does not want us to think that Elisha struck the waters twice any more than he wants us to believe that Elisha picked the robe up twice.<sup>48</sup>

It is Elisha’s question, אַיִה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֵלֶיָּהוּ אַיִה הוּא (2.14), that is of primary concern. The question itself is often by-passed in the commentaries and it may be that it is answered ‘implicitly’ by the parting of the waters.<sup>49</sup> However, it is worth keeping in

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<sup>47</sup> See Burney, *Notes*, 266 for a justification of this rendering.

<sup>48</sup> The repetition B / B' and D / D' are examples of ‘resumptive repetition’. The latter pair is observed in W. Th. van Peursen, ‘The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 1999), 133. While the verb is often the repeated element, other parts of the clause may be as well (p. 133 n.62). Van Peursen (p.133 n.64) follows the treatment of this verse by E. König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik in Bezug auf die biblische Literatur* (Leipzig: Weicher, 1900), 130. Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 354 claim that the repetition should be kept for emphasis. Note that Rahlfs follows a majority of Greek MSS which have καὶ οὐ διέστη from the verb διίστημι *to set apart, to separate*, *LS*, 201. This is not found in LXX<sup>A</sup> or LXX<sup>B</sup>, a fact which Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 356 find remarkable. An exploration of the redactional history of what we have labelled lines C and E may provide a fruitful line of inquiry for future study.

<sup>49</sup> J. K. Mead, “‘Elisha Will Kill’? The Deuteronomistic Rhetoric of Life and Death in the

mind since it is answered, not only in the remainder of chapter 2, but also in the Elisha narratives that follow. What exactly is the nature of this question? Is it a cry of despair or one of faith? If another instance of the question in the Hebrew Bible is any help, it appears that Elisha is asking a question that should be asked. In Jer 2, YHWH decries the fact that neither the fathers who went after ‘worthless things’ (הַהֲבִיל, v.5), nor priests (v.8), nor prophets (who prophesy by Baal) asked the question, ‘Where is YHWH?’ (אַיִהּ יְהוָה, v.6). Ahaziah, the wounded king of the previous chapter does not ask, ‘Where is YHWH?’, but rather ‘Where is Baal-Zebub?’ Elisha is contrasted with a monarch and is shown to be the genuine power in Israel rather than the kings of the Omride dynasty which teeters on the brink of destruction. What are we to make of this contrast between prophet and king?

The issue of leadership raises implications for Elisha as a second Joshua and the nature of the succession of these figures. As noted previously, a number of scholars see within this chapter various narrative connections between the pairs Elijah/Elisha and Moses/Joshua.<sup>50</sup> It is not necessary to recount all of the literary connections of Elijah with Moses, rather we wish to examine whether there is any evidence of the concept of ‘royal succession’ underlying their portrayal.<sup>51</sup> J. R. Porter has argued that Moses and Joshua ‘are depicted as prototypes of the Israelite King’ in the transfer of office from the former to the latter.<sup>52</sup> While the ‘closest parallel’ is to be found in David’s speech to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2.1ff. (p.117), Porter notes a number of pertinent connections which suggest that ‘the undoubted similarities between the two

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Theology of the Elisha Narratives,’ (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), 105.

<sup>50</sup> R. P. Carroll, ‘The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel,’ *VT* 19 (1969) 400-415; Collins, *Mantle*, 133-35, 137-38; Zakovitch, “*And You Shall Tell*”, 74.

<sup>51</sup> For a listing of similarities between Moses and Elijah see M. White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu’s Coup*, BJS 311 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 4-5; Walsh, ‘Elijah Cycle,’ 75-76. However, note the firm contrary statement of B. Childs, ‘On Reading the Elijah Narratives,’ *Int* 34 (1980) 128-37 (135): ‘Elijah is no new Moses!’

<sup>52</sup> J. R. Porter, ‘The Succession of Joshua,’ in J. I. Durham and J. R. Porter (eds.), *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davis* (London: SCM Press, 1970) 102-32 (121).

groups Moses-Joshua and Elijah-Elisha reflect a common royal pattern.<sup>53</sup> This requires further consideration.

First, the term מְשָׁרֵת or the root 'is most frequently used of servants in the royal administration.<sup>54</sup> The term is used of Joshua's service to Moses (Exod 24.13; 33.11; Num 11.28; Josh 1.1) and of Elisha's ministering to Elijah (1 Kgs 19.21) at their first meeting. The word is also used of Elisha's servant (2 Kgs 4.43; 6.15).<sup>55</sup> Second, the example of prophetic succession as developed in 2 Kings 2, is *sui generis* within the corpus of the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup> Gray notes that the command to anoint the kingly figures of Jehu and Hazael is understandable but the anointing of Elisha as a prophetic successor is 'extraordinary.'<sup>57</sup> According to Porter, anointing was confined to the installation of kings before the exile so that even if Elisha's anointing is figurative we must 'give full weight to the background whence it is derived.'<sup>58</sup> Third, the prophetic robe (אֲדָרְתָּה) taken up by Elisha in 2 Kgs 2.13 is the same robe which was thrown to him not long after YHWH's command to anoint him (1 Kgs 19.16b, 19b).<sup>59</sup> C. J. Collins rightly wonders why we do not find a more common word for 'robe' used here (e.g., שְׂמֹנֶה, מְשָׁל) and that 'perhaps the mantle referred to is a magnificent or impressive one.'<sup>60</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, pointing to Jonah 3.6, claim that the word 'generally means a robe of state'.<sup>61</sup> If, in fact, a prophet is being placed in the garments of a king, literally, and within the broader narrative portrayal,

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<sup>53</sup> Porter, 'Succession,' 121 n.62.

<sup>54</sup> Porter, 'Succession,' 120, n.62.

<sup>55</sup> Porter, 'Succession,' 120 n.62.

<sup>56</sup> Carroll, 'Elijah-Elisha Sagas,' 403.

<sup>57</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 411.

<sup>58</sup> Porter, 'Succession,' 120 n.62.

<sup>59</sup> The word אֲדָרְתָּה occurs 12x in the MT: Gen 25.25, Jos 7.21, 24; 1 Kgs 19.13, 19; 2 Kgs 2.8, 13, 14; Ezek 17.8; Jonah 3.6; Zech 11.3, 13.4. Note particularly the conceptual connections of Zech 13.4-5 with several of the Elisha narratives: 'And it shall be on that day, every prophet shall be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies [cf. 2 Kgs 8.11]; and they will not put on a hairy mantle (אֲדָרְתָּה שְׂעִיר) in order to deceive, but he will say, I am no prophet, I am a man who works the ground...' [cf. 1 Kgs 19.19-21].

<sup>60</sup> C. John Collins, 'אֲדָרְתָּה', *NIDOTTE* 1:275-77 (276).

<sup>61</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 316.

then perhaps the word choice is understandable.<sup>62</sup> Elisha destroys his own garment and strikes the waters with this robe. Having left his 'Moses' on the far side of the Jordan, he re-enters the promised land as a second Joshua. Zakovitch observes, 'Elijah crosses the Jordan on dry land, returning to the site of Moses' death, and Elisha repeats his master's miracle, crossing the Jordan to Canaan, like Joshua, where he begins his mission.'<sup>63</sup>

### 2 Kings 2.15-18: The new leader meets his followers

In v.15 the story returns to the fifty sons of the prophets who had previously watched from a distance. Their sighting of Elisha occurs almost immediately after his question, 'Where is YHWH now?' Does Elisha's presence bear any relation to the presence/absence of YHWH? Does Elisha's 'succession' have anything to do with the presence/absence of a monarch? The sons of the prophets now come before Elisha and 'bow down before him to the ground' (וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לָלוֹ אֶרְצָה, v.15b). Within Kings, and indeed broadly throughout the OT, this verb (חווה) is used in two senses; first, of those who bow before a human superior in submission or respect. This use within Kings is clustered exclusively within 1 Kgs 1 and 2 (cf. 1 Kgs 1.16, 23, 31, 53; 2.19). After these chapters it is used in the second sense of 'bowing down in worship', either to other gods (1 Kgs 9.6, 9; 11.33; 16.31; 22.54; 2 Kgs 16.16), to YHWH (2 Kgs 17.35, 36), or towards Jerusalem as the sole place of worship (2 Kgs 18.22). The verb within Kings is never used of one human being bowing before another after the first 2 chapters of 1 Kings, and even within the limited context of these first two chapters it is only those associated with the royal family of David who are the objects of such respect (before David, 1.16, 23; before Solomon, 1.53; before Bathsheba, 2.19). Thus, within the corpus of Kings, Elisha is the exception. He is shown a level of

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<sup>62</sup> Porter also claims that the ascension of Elijah likely has a royal background ('Succession,' 120 n.62). For another royal connection note that Saul is also in the field with oxen and sacrifices them (DeVries, *1 Kings*, 239).

<sup>63</sup> Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell", 74.

respect given only to royalty, gods, or YHWH. Individuals 'bow down to the earth' in Kings only toward David (1 Kgs 1.23) and Elisha (2 Kgs 2.15; 4.37). Certainly within the OT he is the only prophet afforded such treatment. It is interesting that both 1 and 2 Kings begin with the death of a monarch and then a story of succession.

The sons of the prophets clearly recognise that Elijah's prophetic spirit now rests upon Elisha. We have also noted the great respect given him following this insight (2 Kgs 2.15b). I am not suggesting at this point that Elisha is being portrayed as a replacement for the king of Israel. However, it is worth noting that the reminder of Ahab's death and Moab's rebellion in 2 Kgs 1.1, begins a chapter in which we find Ahaziah, the king of Israel, wounded and sick, ineffective, seeking other gods and having no son to follow him. That same notice is repeated in 2 Kgs 3.5 following Elisha's succession of Elijah, taking up a robe often associated with royalty and given royal treatment by the sons of the prophets. With Elisha's portrayal as a second Joshua it is possible that these narratives foreshadow the end of kingship, both of Israel and Judah as Elisha initiates a new conquest that will, like the first, fall short of complete realisation. Satterthwaite asks:

Is Elisha, the second Joshua, initiating a second 'conquest' of the land in which the people's hearts are won back to YHWH, and the quasi-Canaanite worship of the North purged, completing the process begun by Elijah on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki. 18)? The natural implication of the Moses-Joshua 'typology' is that Elisha (Joshua) completes the conquest which Elijah (Moses) has not lived to see. Are the 'sons of the prophets', who feature prominently in ch. 2, to form the nucleus of a restored Israel?<sup>64</sup>

The 'spirit' with which Joshua was filled as well as the obedience of the sons of Israel is highlighted at the crucial point of Moses' passing (Deut 34.9). If the sons of the prophets are the 'nucleus of a restored Israel' they are not a very obedient nucleus being more like unruly children; although they recognise the spirit of Elijah resting upon Elisha, they ignore his command, 'You shall not send' (לֹא תִשְׁלָחֵהוּ, v. 16b), and pester him until he allows them to search for the missing Elijah. His response at their

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<sup>64</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 8-9.

failure, 'Did I not say to you, "You shall not go?"', is not far from the exasperated cry of a parent, 'Why did you not listen to me?'

### 2 Kings 2.19-25: Where is YHWH God of Elijah?

The body of Elijah, like that of Moses before him, is never found. The two short stories which follow Elijah's ascension and the search for his remains are well integrated within the immediate context of chapter two.<sup>65</sup> This is evidenced by the prominence of the place names *Bethel* (vv. 2, 2, 3, 23) and *Jericho* (4, 4, 5, 15, 18) and the role geography plays in the narrative structure.

Elijah and Elisha at *Bethel* (vv. 2-3)

Elijah and Elisha at *Jericho* (vv. 4-5)

Elijah and Elisha at the *Jordan* (v. 6)

Both cross the *Jordan*, Elijah ascends, Elisha becomes successor (vv. 8-12)

Elisha crosses over the *Jordan* (vv. 13-14)

Elisha at *Jericho* (vv. 15-22)

Elisha on the way to *Bethel* (vv. 23-24)<sup>66</sup>

The stories from vv. 19-25 are programmatic, acting as a kind of summation for the kinds of activities associated with Elisha in the ensuing tales and an answer to the question, 'Where is YHWH?' which preceded. What follows below is a brief summary of the narratives followed by a discussion of their literary function. We will attempt to provide an interpretation that goes beyond the elevation of the holy man as an explanation for these stories.<sup>67</sup>

Elisha, like Joshua before him turns his attention to Jericho soon after crossing the Jordan (Josh 6 // 2 Kgs 2.18). He learns from the men of the city (v. 19b) that the water is unwholesome (המים רעים) and the land is causing miscarriages (משקלת). After requesting a new bowl containing salt (קחורלי צלחית חדשה ושימו שם מלח) (v.20), Elisha

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<sup>65</sup> D. R. Davis, 'The Kingdom of God in Transition: Interpreting 2 Kings 2,' *WTJ* 46 (1984) 384-95.

<sup>66</sup> Taken with minor revision from Conroy, 'Hiel,' 215 who also points out the frequency with which these place names occur. The complex geographical movements imply both a testing of Elisha and a retracing of Israel's earliest steps in Josh 5-8 (Auld, *Kings*, 154).

<sup>67</sup> See for example, Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 15; Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell", 75

ventures to the source of the spring (וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-מוֹצָא הַמַּיִם, v.21) and casts the salt there (וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ-שָׁם מֶלַח, v.21). What follows is the fourth instance of a messenger formula in 2 Kings:

וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה רַפְּאֵתִי לַמַּיִם הָאֵלֶּה לְאִי-יְהוָה מָשָׁם עוֹד מוֹת וּמִשְׁבָּלֶת  
וַיִּרְפּוּ הַמַּיִם עַד הַיּוֹם כַּדְּבַר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר

And he said, 'Thus says YHWH, "I heal<sup>68</sup> these waters. Neither death nor miscarriage shall come from there again.'" And the waters remain healed<sup>69</sup> until this day according to the word which Elisha had spoken (2 Kgs 2.21b-22).

In this first story a special connection is forged between this prophet's words and actions and YHWH's words and actions. It is YHWH's 'Thus says' which is done 'according to the word of Elisha'. Several other times within the northern prophetic narratives one human being acts 'according to the word of' the prophet (1 Kgs 17.15; 2 Kgs 5.14; 2Kgs 8.2), but in all other instances it is כַּדְּבַר יְהוָה.<sup>70</sup> This need not be such a 'disquieting component of the story' if Elisha is a representative of YHWH.<sup>71</sup> YHWH, through the prophet, brings life from what once caused death.<sup>72</sup> This is not the last time that Elisha performs such a feat (2 Kgs 4.38-41) nor the last time that the prophet's life-giving and life-taking powers are paramount (2 Kgs 5). Following the healing of the waters and land is a story in which the prophet's words do not bring life but retribution and death.

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<sup>68</sup> This may be a 'performative perfect' in which the declaration itself brings about the change, as for example, in the statement 'I now pronounce you husband and wife.' However, such perfects are often associated with verbs of speaking and usually within a ceremonial setting (M. Rogland, private communication).

<sup>69</sup> Literally, 'and the waters were weakened'. On the difficulty of the pointing רַפְּאֵתִי vs. the expected רַפִּיתִי see D. Sperber, 'Weak Waters,' *ZAW* 82 (1970) 114-16. Also, 'And they were healed,' (v. 22) should read וַיִּרְפְּאוּ and would therefore be derived from רַפָּה. Sperber suggests that the confusion points at two elements in the miracle, namely the removal of harmful effects from the water as well as its desalination (p.116).

<sup>70</sup> 1 Kgs 12.24; 13.26; 14.18; 15.29; 16.12, 34; 17.5, 16; 22.13, 38; 2 Kgs 1.17; 2.22; 4.44; 6.18; 7.16; 9.26; 10.17; 14.25; 23.16; 24.2. See also 1 Sam 4.1.

<sup>71</sup> Bergen claims that 'according to the word of Elisha' makes the reader suspicious (Bergen, *Elisha*, 67). What is confusing is that elsewhere Bergen claims that the role of YHWH is taken over by Elisha (p.144). If that is so, it is difficult to understand why the equation 'according to the word of YHWH' = 'according to the word of Elisha' should be so problematic.

<sup>72</sup> The story may be compared with Moses' healing of the waters of Marah (Exod 15.22-26). See Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell", 75 for a discussion.

The narrative begins with Elisha on his way up (וַיַּעַל) to Bethel in v.23. During his travels (וְהוּא עֹלֶה בְּדֶרֶךְ) he is confronted by נְעָרִים קְטַנִּים ('little boys')<sup>73</sup> who come out (וַיֵּצְאוּ) from the city to mock him (וַיִּתְקַלְסוּבוּ)<sup>74</sup> with the taunt עֲלֵה קִרְחָה עֲלֵה קִרְחָה.<sup>75</sup> The prophet's response and its results are portrayed with a series of *wayyiqtol* verbs:

And he turned around  
and saw them  
and cursed them in the name of YHWH  
and two female bears came out from the wood  
and mauled<sup>76</sup> forty-two of the children (2 Kgs 2.24).

וַיִּפֶן אַחֲרָיו  
וַיֵּרְאֵם  
וַיִּקְלַלֵם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה  
וַתֵּצְאֶנָּה שְׁתֵּי דְבִים מִן־הַיַּעַר  
וַתִּבְקַעְנָה מֵהֶם אַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁנַיִם יְלָדִים

Elisha's curse must not be interpreted apart from the story of blessing which has preceded it, nor indeed from the wider literary context in which it is placed. The first story (vv.19-22) interacts with and informs the second (vv.23-25). In the case of Jericho's waters the prophet has acted to heal that which was causing miscarriage or bereavement. The *piel* of שָׁכַל is used almost exclusively of the bereavement associated with the loss of children.<sup>77</sup> Numerous passages within the OT are

<sup>73</sup> One can certainly sympathise with the attempts of various interpreters and translations to transform these children into older 'hooligans'. It is more likely however, that the phrase נְעָרִים קְטַנִּים refers to 'little boys' (See *BDB*: 655 s.v. נָעַר). Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 9 n.21 observes that the only other examples of נָעַר קָטָן in Kings (1 Kgs 3.7, 2 Kgs 5.14) 'seem to have a young child in mind.' We thus agree with Mead, 'Elisha Will Kill?,' 112 n.45 where he claims that 'they were old enough to know what they were doing, but not necessarily as culpable as mature adults' (p.112 n.45). See also Davis, 'Kingdom of God,' 392-93.

<sup>74</sup> קָלַס is found only here and Ez 16.31; 22.5; Hab 1.10.

<sup>75</sup> Elisha's baldness is a source of contradictory statements among commentators being viewed as either natural baldness (Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 38) or a sign of dedication 'to the service of God' (Gray, *Kings*, 480). While it may not be possible to confirm the matter with any certainty, it is interesting that the entries for קִרְחָה and its cognates in *BDB*: 901 associate baldness with mourning for the dead. This would fit well with Elisha's earlier distress over the removal of his master. At least one commentator suggests: 'Elisha no doubt performed this cutting [of his hair] in mourning for Elijah' (W. E. Barnes, *The Two Books of the Kings*, CBSC (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), 190).

<sup>76</sup> The interplay between these two stories makes less likely the suggestion of Brichto, *Towards a Grammar*, 197-98 that the two bears merely 'break up' or 'scatter' the boys. The other occurrences of the *piel* of בָּקַע in Kings (2 Kgs 8.12; 15.16) are associated with the 'ripping open' of pregnant women. See Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 9 n.21.

<sup>77</sup> The verb is attested in the *qal* Gen 27.45; 43.14 (2x); 1 Sam 15.33; *piel* Gen 31.38; 42.36; Exod 23.26; Lev 26.22; Deut 32.25; 1 Sam 15.33; 2 Kgs 2.19, 21; Jer 15.7; Ezek 5.17; 14.15; 36.12, 13, 14; Hos 9.12; Mal 3.11; Job 21.10; Lam 1.20; *hifil* Jer 50.9; Hos 9.14. Jer 50.9 is usually emended (see *BDB*: 968, s.v. שָׁכַל).

particularly relevant to the interpretation of the present stories. One example is found in Exodus 23.25-26.

...וּבִרְךְ אֶת-לֶחֶמְךָ וְאֶת-מִימֶיךָ וְהִסְרֹתִי מִחֲלָה מִקֶּרְבְּךָ  
לֹא תִהְיֶה מִשְׁכָּלָה וְעִקְרָה בְּאֶרֶץְךָ...

'...and He will bless your bread and your water and I will take away sickness from your midst. There will not be miscarrying and barrenness in your land' (Exod 23.25-26).

The analogies of these verses with the 2 Kings narratives are apparent as in each case YHWH promises to remove *מִשְׁכָּלָה* from the land. Of course YHWH/Elisha have just healed the water so that it is not only the removal of miscarrying; both Exod 23.25 and the later Elisha narratives (at several points) focus on the provision of the staples of life such as bread and water. This will be explored in due course.

Of course the promise of Yahwistic blessing (removal of sickness and bereavement) represented in 2 Kgs 2.19-22 and reflected in Ex 23.25 is not a blanket promise to all in Israel. Already, 2 Kgs 1 has highlighted the persistent sickness and death of Israel's head of state. The 'men of the city' of Jericho who experience the healing of their water and (by implication) their land stand in marked contrast to the families in Bethel who experience only the reality of bereavement in the loss of their sons.

In several other texts the failure of Israel to obey the commandments of YHWH results in judgment as YHWH sends wild beasts and the associated *שָׂכַל* that results from such attacks:

וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי בְּכֶם אֶת-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְשָׂכְלָה אֶתְכֶם...

'And I will send among you wild beasts and they shall make you childless...' <sup>78</sup> (Lev 26.22).

וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם רָעַב וְחַיָּה רָעָה וְשָׂכְלָה...

'And I will send famine and wild beasts against you and they shall make you childless...' (Ez 5.17).

לֹא-יִחְיֶה רָעַב אֲעִבִיר בְּאֶרֶץ וְשָׂכְלָתָה...

'If I were to cause a wild beast to pass through the land so that it [beast] made it [land] childless...' (Ez 14.15).

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<sup>78</sup> The piel 3fs *שָׂכְלָה* is treating the plural *חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה* in collective fashion. The RSV translates with a relative clause 'which shall rob you of your children' while the NIV treats the verb as a plural 'they will rob you of your children.' Davis comes independently to a similar conclusion for Lev 26.22. He sees the story of 2 Kgs 2.23-25 as an illustration of the levitical warnings ('Kingdom of God,' 393).

One final passage from Hosea, a book focusing squarely on the apostasy of Ephraim, particularly as it relates to Baal worship, concentrates many of these lexemes. Here YHWH is portrayed both as a bear who, bereft of her young, goes on the attack and as a ravenous lioness:

אֶפְנֵשׁם כְּדֹב שְׂכוּל וְאֶקְרַע סִנּוֹר לֶבֶם וְאֶכְלֶם שֵׁם כְּלָבִיא חַיִּית הַשָּׂדֶה תִּבְקַעֵם

'I will meet them like a bear robbed of her cubs,  
and will tear open the enclosure of their heart,  
and will devour there like a lioness;  
a wild beast shall tear them apart' (Hos 13.8).<sup>79</sup>

Elisha is given a YHWH-like status in bringing about both life and death, both blessing and destruction. In succinct narrative form 2 Kgs 2.19-22 presents a hope of promised blessing in the 'renewed Jericho', while 2 Kgs 2.23-25 is a harbinger of impending judgment for those who come out of Bethel. When the broader canvas is viewed, the narratives do more than 'attest merely to the supernatural power of the Man of God who performs them.'<sup>80</sup>

As strange and as difficult as 2 Kgs 2.23-25 is to modern sensibilities, the perdition of the children should not be viewed as a case of prophetic petulance. Rather, both stories are well suited to their literary context, contrasting a group of people who seek the prophet for healing (unlike Ahaziah), with the offspring of Bethel who mock him.

In these episodes the writer is providing a clue about the end of his larger story, still to come but known already to his audience. The city of Jerusalem will not be saved, and its 'children' will be destroyed by enemies, because of their failure to take prophets seriously. These two stories, which must be taken together, are part of the web of cross-references which we need to keep in view in order to appreciate both the artificial nature of the stories about prophets and the seriousness of their intent.<sup>81</sup>

In the first story death and bereavement are done away with in an act of healing, while in the second these very elements come upon the people of Bethel with

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<sup>79</sup> For this imagery see also 2 Sam 17.8; Prov 17.12.

<sup>80</sup> Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 14. Collins, *Mantle*, 139 notes the feature of blessing (life) and cursing (death) which follow Elisha's reception as 'my lord' and 'baldy' respectively.

<sup>81</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 139.

dramatic force. Rofé rightly notes that the categories are not 'good and evil' but 'sacred and profane': 'A Man of God is a holy figure (2 Kgs 4:9) and as such must be treated with veneration, just as one behaves towards the Divine and the objects associated with the Divine.'<sup>82</sup>

One may even argue that given the theological perspective of Kings with respect to Baal worship, the removal of the offspring of Baal worshipers in the second story, like the healing of the spring at its source in the first story, may have been viewed palliatively. Satterthwaite comments that 'the death or capture of children is one of the most devastating forms which judgment can take in the Bible, cutting off the future hope of a people.'<sup>83</sup> The mauling of 'forty-two' may also lend support to this interpretation since the number is frequently associated with death and destruction in the Hebrew Bible and NT.<sup>84</sup> Judgment upon the 'sons of Bethel' would not be unexpected given the highly negative connotations associated with Bethel from 1Kgs

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<sup>82</sup> Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 16. He makes a comparison with the treatment given to the sons of Aaron (Lev 10.1-3) and Uzzah (2 Sam 6.6-8).

<sup>83</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 9.

<sup>84</sup> E.g., 2 Kgs 10.12-14. See the appendix 'The Answer to the Meaning of Life, the Universe and the Elohist Psalter,' in L. Yoffe, 'Semantic and Stylistic Differences between Yahweh and Elohim in the Hebrew Bible' (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1998), 264-78 (268, 275-76). This appendix is forthcoming as an article in *JSOT*.

12 to 2 Kgs 23.<sup>85</sup> The curse declared by the first Joshua (Josh 6.26) comes upon Hiel of Bethel (1 Kgs 16.34) who loses his two sons in the rebuilding of Jericho. Elisha, the second Joshua, heals the waters and land of Jericho but then utters his own curse.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Conroy, 'Hiel,' 216. The place name *בֵּית־אֵל* is clustered in four distinct places in the books of Kings. (1) In 1 Kgs 12 Bethel, along with Dan, is one of the sites housing Jeroboam's golden calves; (2) at 1 Kgs 13 the man of God from Judah prophecies against the altar at Bethel; (3) in 2 Kgs 2 the passage under discussion; (4) and in 2 Kgs 23 where Josiah fulfils the prophecy made in 1 Kgs 13 regarding the altar at Bethel. It is interesting to note that apart from the mention in 1 Kgs 16.34 (*בֵּית הָאֵל*) – at the 'doorway' to the Elijah/Ahab narratives, Bethel is not mentioned again until 2 Kgs 2.2.

<sup>86</sup> Elisha's curse (*קלל*) and Joshua's curse (*ארר*) are synonymous yet 'the thematic contact remains' according to Conroy, 'Hiel,' 216.

## COLLAPSING KINGDOMS AND IDENTITY LOSS (2 KINGS 3)

2 Kings 3.1-3: Ahab and Jezebel lead to Moab

In the previous chapter it was argued that the portrayal of Elisha has elements both royal and divine. If the narrative presence of the prophet is elevated, we might expect the narrative presence of the king to be diminished. Several features of 2 Kgs 3 illustrate this. The concept of a confusion of identity, when considered in the light of our previous discussion, suffuses the present story. Although the narrator had earlier mentioned Jehoram as one who followed Ahaziah to the throne (1.17), we were given no specifics about him at that time. However, 2 Kgs 3 commences with new information: Jehoram a ‘son of Ahab’ is now on the throne (v.1). The connection with Ahab and Jezebel is made even more explicit in 2 Kgs 3.2 where we learn that Jehoram is their son who, while not as evil in YHWH’s eyes, still clung to the sins of Jeroboam. His removal of the *מִזְבֵּחַ הַבַּעַל* which his father had built (v.2b) recalls the *מִזְבֵּחַ* of 1 Kgs 16.32. This is especially poignant given the connection of Ahab with Hiel of Bethel, the return of Ahab and Jezebel to the narration, and the second reminder of the revolt of Moab as the narrative begins a more detailed treatment of the second son of Ahab.<sup>1</sup> These reminders function as an *inclusio* either side of Ahaziah’s apostasy on the one hand and Elisha’s succession to Elijah on the other.<sup>2</sup> The first instance (2 Kgs 1.1) is followed by the account of Ahaziah’s demise. After the second instance (2 Kgs 3.5) Jehoram will become an anonymous figure, a

<sup>1</sup> O. Thenius, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1873), 278. Burney, *Notes*, 268. Relying upon Conroy’s work, we have previously noted the relationship between Ahab and Hiel of Bethel. Ahab has already lost one son. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, 43) claim that Jehoram’s ‘partial rooting out of foreign influence’ softened the Dtr’s editorial criticism. It may be better to say that the criticism took on implicit rather than explicit mode of expression. Even so, we will find Elisha reserving some harsh words for Jehoram.

<sup>2</sup> Satterthwaite, ‘Elisha Narratives,’ 11 makes the point that such revolts are frequently viewed as judgments in Kings (1 Kgs 11.14-25). From the point of syntax, 3.5 may be viewed as a ‘resumptive’ use of the infinitive construct in order to achieve cohesion. Here it ‘echoes’ 2 Kgs 1.1. See Gropp, ‘Progress and Cohesion,’ 200.

narrative non-entity, and Jehoshaphat, as a character, is also heard from no more. How does 2 Kgs 3 develop this?

### 2 Kings 3.4-8: Jehoshaphat's statement of identity

The story in chapter 3 has a number of connections with the battle in which Ahab is killed in 1 Kgs 22. In each instance a king of Israel (Ahab/Jehoram) seeks the help of Jehoshaphat, a king of Judah, in response to the crisis of a foreign threat. Ahab's question in 1 Kgs 22.4,

‘...will you go with me to wage war at Ramoth Gilead?’  
התלך אתי למלחמה רמת גלעד

is nearly identical to Jehoram's question in 2 Kgs 3.7,

‘Will you go with me to Moab to wage war?’  
התלך אתי אל-מואב למלחמה

and in each case Jehoshaphat's response is exactly the same:

‘I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses’ (1 Kgs 22.4b; 2 Kgs 3.7b).  
קמוני כמוך קעמי קעמך כסוסי כסוסיך

Jehoshaphat could hardly have said anything to confirm more explicitly the intermingling and identification of northern with southern kings, people, and resources. The grammatical construction of the sentence urges such a conclusion.

With כ...כ (or כ...כ Josh 14.11; 1Sm 30.24; Ez 18.4; Dn 11.29), it is not exactly being said that the first thing is *like* the second nor (Josh 14.11; Jdg 8.18; 1 Sm 30.24; Is 24.2) that the second thing is *like* the first, but rather that the first thing is like the second *and* the second is like the first (so the sequence of the members is immaterial and there is the possibility of using כ). In other words, the two terms are declared identical in some regard.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J-M §174i. DeVries notes that the difficulty of the syntax arises when כ precedes a noun or verbal noun and is followed asyndetically by a second כ in a similar linguistic environment. This has the effect of ‘equating the two while maintaining the comparison-subject relationship’ (S. DeVries, ‘The Three Comparisons in 1 Kings XXII 4b and its Parallel and 2 Kings III 7b,’ *VT* 39 (1989) 283-306 (284).

Indeed, in those narratives in which we find Jehoshaphat interacting with Ahab and Jehoram, he makes himself and his army fully available to the kings of Israel. It is no mere throwaway sentence when, after numerous positive comments on the reign of Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22.41-43), the narrator tells us that he ‘made peace with the king of Israel’ (1 Kgs 22.45).

Another connection between these stories, and one that contrasts sharply with Ahaziah in chapter one, is Jehoshaphat’s desire to seek a prophet of YHWH, the very thing that Ahaziah did not do. In each case (1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 1; 2 Kgs 3) a king of the Omride dynasty ignores YHWH’s word. Note again the nearly identical nature of Jehoshaphat’s questions:

הֲאִין פֹּה נְבִיא לַיהוָה עוֹד וְנִדְרָשָׁה מֵאוֹתוֹ

‘Is there not here still a prophet of YHWH that<sup>4</sup> we may inquire from him?’ (1 Kgs 22.7).

הֲאִין פֹּה נְבִיא לַיהוָה וְנִדְרָשָׁה אֶת־יְהוָה מֵאוֹתוֹ

‘Is there not here a prophet of YHWH that we may inquire of YHWH from him?’ (2 Kgs 3.11).

What does any of this have to do with the loss of Jehoram’s narrative identity? First, from just before Jehoshaphat’s statement of equality in 3.7 until 2 Kgs 8.16, Jehoram is not mentioned by name again, but throughout is identified only by the anonymous title ‘king of Israel’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, 2 Kgs 3.6 is the last time that Jehoram is mentioned by name and from this point forward the narrative treats him as an anonymous figure. In the designation used in 3.6, ‘the king’ comes before the personal name (PN). This formulation, הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוֹרָם, is unique for a king of Israel.<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew Bible has five other examples in which the phrase is reversed from that found in 2 Kgs 3.6 and ‘the king’ (הַמֶּלֶךְ) follows the personal name rather than

<sup>4</sup> The cohortative is used here expressing purpose (J-M §116a).

<sup>5</sup> De Vries, ‘Three Comparisons,’ asserts that the proper name is ‘an obvious gloss’ and ‘of dubious originality’ since elsewhere in the passage the designation ‘king of Israel’ is used. However, he cites no versional support for his assertion.

<sup>6</sup> E. J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual. Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996), 139. The title occurs hundreds of times but as a title for a king of Israel only here. See also 2 Kgs 11.2 where בֶּת־הַמֶּלֶךְ־יְיֹרָם is used to describe Jehosheba.

preceding it.<sup>7</sup> In discussing this latter group Revell tentatively suggests that several of the occurrences of 'PN the king' may portray a king engaged in unexpected or 'unkingly' behaviour.<sup>8</sup> For example, in 1 Sam 18.6 'Saul the king' is clearly being put down by the singing he hears after David's defeat of Goliath. Revell states,

The form of this designation can be variously interpreted, but the suggestion that it is one of the means used by the narrator to suggest Saul's unworthiness is not unlikely. There is no way of showing that the placing of the title in these five cases does represent the narrator's intention, but it is by no means impossible that it should.<sup>9</sup>

Of course in 2 Kgs 3.6 Jehoram's name comes after the title and not before. Revell notes that even this form ('the King PN') 'is occasionally used where the action might seem quite as unkingly' as in the five cases of 'PN the king'.<sup>10</sup> Clearly the mustering of troops for battle is kingly behaviour. However, at 2 Kgs 3.6, the final time we read Jehoram's name within 2 Kgs 2.1-8.15, it is attested in a form employed elsewhere only of kings of Judah and it is placed right before Jehoshaphat's statement of unity with Israel. Whether the form 'the king Jehoram' in 3.6 is intended to reflect the intermingling of the kingdoms cannot be argued with certainty. Given the notice that Jehoram mustered 'all Israel' (v.6b), the possibility must remain open.<sup>11</sup>

While the anonymity of the king of Israel is often pointed out in relation to the Elisha narratives, this 'loss of information' is also evident in the treatment of Ahab at 1 Kings 22, in the very context where the other 'I am as you are, my people as your people...' statement of Jehoshaphat occurs. From the opening of 1 Kgs 22.1 until the

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<sup>7</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 368. These occur at 1 Sam 18.6 ('Saul the king'); 2 Sam 13.39 ('David the king'); 1 Kgs 2.17 (Adonijah requests Bathsheba to speak to 'Solomon the king'). The final two examples surprisingly occur at 2 Kgs 8.29 and 9.15. We will treat these in due course.

<sup>8</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 368.

<sup>9</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 368.

<sup>10</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 368. The example provided is 2 Sam 3.31 where David mourns the death of Abner.

<sup>11</sup> Bergen, 'Prophetic Alternative,' 134 grants to the author(s) some semblance of intelligence concerning the confusion over the names of kings.

death of Ahab in 22.39, his name is used only once and that by YHWH himself at the very centre of the narrative (22.20).<sup>12</sup>

In the interpretation of the Elisha narratives generally, the use of the anonymous 'king of Israel' is viewed as evidence of the secondary nature of these stories. McKenzie writes: 'As with the Elisha stories in 2 Kings, the king of Israel in 1 Kings 20 and 22:1-38 was originally nameless. The concern of the stories originally was with prophets and prophecy. The names of the kings were relatively unimportant.'<sup>13</sup> While the names of the kings may have been relatively unimportant, what of the anonymity of the king? Is this just as unimportant? Is there a purposeful use of anonymity? There are instances of the use of 'king of Israel' in a derogatory fashion. In 2 Sam 6.20 David returns home to meet the harsh comment of his wife:

מִה־נִכְבַּד הַיּוֹם מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר נִגְלָה הַיּוֹם לְעֵינֵי אִמְהוֹת עַבְדָּיו

'How honoured today is the king of Israel, who exposed himself today before the eyes of his servants' slave girls...' (2 Sam 6.20).

Here the more usual designation 'king David' is replaced by the more impersonal 'king of Israel'; the king is mocked by the use of his political title.<sup>14</sup> Similar examples are found at 1 Sam 26.20 and 24.14 where David complains of Saul that 'the king of Israel' has come out to search for a flea.<sup>15</sup> It is at least possible that a similar function may also span the larger narrative range of 2 Kgs 4-8. If the Elisha narratives criticise kings or the institution of kingship to any significant degree, then we would expect the name or identity of the object of ridicule to remain concealed. This is in fact one of the characteristics of political satire.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This latter point was brought to my attention by A. G. Auld.

<sup>13</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 90.

<sup>14</sup> C. L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, HSM 55 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 274. Revell, *Designations*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Revell, *Designations*, 18. These two verses set up a contrast between the 'king of Israel' and his behaviour.

<sup>16</sup> See Ze'ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, SBLSS 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 8. Weisman writes: 'In many cases the satirist does not reveal the name or identity of the object of criticism, but makes use of nicknames, metaphors, allegory and even parody that allude to that object. The use of camouflage is applied either out of personal precaution or as an artistic technique.'

However, it is not only anonymity that we are concerned about. Although it is true that in 1 Kgs 20 Ahab is more frequently identified by the title ‘king of Israel’ than by any other,<sup>17</sup> there is also language in this chapter which brings to mind Jehoshaphat’s statement of unity. When Ahab sets Ben-hadad free (1 Kgs 20.34), rather than dealing with him according to YHWH’s command in Deut 24.7, one of the sons of the prophets confronts Ahab with a judgment saying:

וְהַיְתָה נַפְשְׁךָ תַּחַת נַפְשׁוֹ וְעַמְּךָ תַּחַת עַמּוֹ

‘And it shall be your life instead of his life and your people instead of his people’ (1 Kgs 20.42).

Jehoshaphat’s statement of 2 Kgs 3.7b envisions Judah and Israel as one people while the statement above encourages a sense of ‘exchange’ between Ahab and his people and Ben-hadad and his people. D. P. O’Brien argues that these two themes are played out in the Elisha narratives: the rejection of Ahab and the elevation of Aram. The curse formula of 1 Kgs 20.42 hints at the ultimate rejection of Ahab and the dramatic protection of Aram by YHWH: ‘Aram becomes a punitive instrument in the hands of Yahweh against Israel and is the cause of much of the latter’s distress.’<sup>18</sup>

This confusion of royal identity is an explicit concern in 1 Kgs 22.29-32. The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat go up to Ramoth-Gilead to wage war with the king of Aram. As Saul had previously (1 Sam 28.8), so now Ahab disguises himself while Jehoshaphat wears his own robes.<sup>19</sup> When the Aramean army sees Jehoshaphat, however, they mistake him for Ahab:

וַיְהִי כִּי רָאוּ שָׂרֵי הָרֶכֶב אֶת־יְהוֹשָׁפָט וְהָמָּה אָמְרוּ אֵךְ מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא

<sup>17</sup> He is called ‘Ahab’ (1 Kgs 20.14); ‘Ahab, king of Israel’ (1 Kgs 20.2, 13); king of Israel (1 Kgs 20.4, 7, 11, 21, 22, 28, 31, 32, 40, 41, 43).

<sup>18</sup> D. P. O’Brien, “‘Is this the time to accept...?’” (2 Kings V 26B): Simply moralizing (LXX) or an ominous foreboding of Yahweh’s rejection of Israel (MT)?, 448-57 (455). This thesis is argued in more detail by C.-J. Axskjöld, *Aram as the Enemy Friend: the Ideological Role of Aram in the Composition of Genesis – 2 Kings*, ConBOT 45 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1998), 145. He claims that the Arameans are the instruments of YHWH and, in close collaboration with Elisha, bring judgment upon Israel and its kings ‘because of their repeated law-breaking and cultic wrongdoing.’

<sup>19</sup> See R. Coggins, ‘On Kings and Disguises,’ *JSOT* 50 (1991) 55-62. This is reproduced in J. Cheryl Exum (ed.), *The Historical Books: A Sheffield Reader*, The Biblical Seminar 40 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 249-255.

And it came about when the commanders of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat they said, 'Surely he is the king of Israel' (1 Kgs 22.32).

Before proceeding further it may be helpful to summarise the argument to this point. We began by noting the rebellion of Moab mentioned at 1.1 and its implied judgment against Ahab's house. Ahaziah dies in 2 Kgs 1 and we learn of 'the extraordinary coincidence' of the two Jorams (1 Kgs 1.17).<sup>20</sup> Elisha follows Elijah in 2 Kgs 2, while Moab's rebellion is reiterated in 2 Kgs 3.5. In Jehoshaphat's statement of equality (3.7b), he does more than simply highlight the similarities of the kingdoms or to make himself available to the king of Israel; the kingdoms are not somewhat alike – they are identical. Looking at related passages in 1 Kings 20 and 22, we noted the connection between the presence of anonymity and identity exchange. In accordance with the analogy to Hiel's sons in 1 Kgs 16.34, both sons of Ahab face an untimely death. Although it is presumably Jehoram who is the king within chapters 4-8, he is never again mentioned by name from 3.6-8.15.

It is possible that these stories (1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 3) share a common earlier source and likely that they are dependent upon one another.<sup>21</sup> McKenzie holds that the names of the kings were not very important and that prophets and prophecy were the main issue. Of course this begs the question as to why the names of kings were unimportant. The fact remains that we have a rather significant swathe of text from 2 Kgs 4-8 wherein the king of Israel remains unnamed. According to the narrative context the king is Jehoram and his name could have been added as was Ahab's in 1 Kgs 22.20.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, prophets and prophecy do not act in a narrative vacuum; it is prophets and prophecy in relationship to the monarchy that is the primary concern.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Strange, 'Joram, King of Israel and Judah,' *VT* 25 (1975) 191-201 (192, 195).

<sup>21</sup> On their complex development and relationship see S. J. DeVries, 'Three Comparisons,' 298-99. Arguing against the prevailing view DeVries holds 2 Kgs 3 to be tradition-historically dependent upon 1 Kgs 22 rather than vice versa. Judahite authorship is often claimed due to the fact that Elisha speaks harshly to Jehoram. DeVries instead holds a northern-Israelite provenance for both narratives composed by Jehuite prophets though perhaps one hundred years separate the compositions. See also *id.*, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

<sup>22</sup> So McKenzie, *Trouble*, 90.

The anonymity of kings is important and it is this anonymity which paves the way for the elevation of the prophet Elisha. Hence our earlier grouping of miracle stories, royal anonymity, and the collapsing of the kingdoms as a thematic element in the Elisha stories. A by-product of this portrayal in the central portion of the book of Kings is the growing rapprochement between Israel and Judah, and the inability of the reader to distinguish clearly between the two.

### 2 Kings 3.9-25: Pay no attention to the man with the crown

In further supporting this position several other narrative features may be expounded. The meeting between Elisha and Jehoram occurs in chapter 3.11-19 in response to the second crisis of the narrative, the lack of water.<sup>23</sup> Jehoram posits less than noble intent to YHWH, expecting only the worst with his complaint in v.10: 'Alas! For YHWH has called<sup>24</sup> to these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab' (בְּיַד־מוֹאָב). The king attributes this negative turn of events to YHWH not once, but twice (vv.10, 13b). For him, the lack of water is evidence that they are being given into the hand of Moab and that by YHWH! Notice that the king never says explicitly why he believes YHWH is handing them over to Moab. It is established by the implicit link the reader makes between lack of water and a presumed military outcome. This narrative movement from water to conflict with Moab is thrice repeated within the narrative. Besides the narrative and kingly comments of vv. 9-10, Elisha's oracle moves from the promise of water (vv.16-17) to the promise of victory (vv.18-20), and the oracular fulfilment moves from water (now appearing as blood, v.20) to victory over Moab (vv.21-25). The connection between water and hands is foreshadowed as the servant of the king recalls that a prophet of YHWH is available (v.11b).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 34 notes the two crises of the narrative.

<sup>24</sup> The phrase כִּי־קָרָא יְהוָה is found only in the Elisha narratives (2 Kgs 3.10, 13; 8.1), however, see Deut 15.2 for a similar statement.

<sup>25</sup> Note that at least in 1 Kgs 22.8 the king knows of a prophet of YHWH and that this is also the

Overall the king fails to do the one thing which he was called upon to do in a time of military crises, viz., trust YHWH for protection.<sup>26</sup>

With his rhetorical question (מָה־לִּי וְלָךְ, v.13) the prophet asks, 'Why are you coming to consult me?' This is confirmed by Elisha's command that Jehoram should, like his brother before him, go to 'the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother' (v.13; cf., 1 Kgs 22.52). In view of the themes of chapter 1, the prophet's statement is best viewed as a subtle reversal of YHWH's question through Elijah (2 Kgs 1.3, 6, 16). In Elisha's mouth it becomes, 'Are there no prophets of Baal, that you come to consult a prophet of YHWH?' (cf. דַּרְשׁ 2 Kgs 1.2b; 3.11a).<sup>27</sup>

Important for our argument is the next utterance of Elisha, a syntactically complex statement whose protasis addresses an unreal condition.<sup>28</sup> After the oath formula 'By the life of YHWH hosts before whom I stand,'<sup>29</sup> the prophet claims:

כִּי לֹלֵאִי פָּנָי יְהוֹשָׁפָט מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲנִי נֹשֵׂא אִם־אֶבִּיט אֶלֶיךָ וְאִם־אֶרְאֶךָ

'If not for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would neither show regard to you, nor see you' (2 Kgs 3.14).

This statement is important because it functions at two levels. First in the mouth of the character Elisha it provides prophetic evaluation of both Jehoram and Jehoshaphat. Were Jehoshaphat not present, Jehoram would be non-existent, even invisible to Elisha. This is an unreal condition; Jehoshaphat is in fact present. The statement also functions at a broader narrative level. The narrative meaning is

issue in 2 Kgs 5.8 when the king Israel returns to the narrative after his absence in chapter 4.

<sup>26</sup> So G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 190.

<sup>27</sup> The verb דַּרְשׁ occurs within Kings at 1 Kgs 14.5 (of Ahijah); 22.5, 7, 8 (of Micaiah); 2 Kgs 1.2, 3, 6, 16 (of Elijah); 3.11; 8.8 (of Elisha); 22.13, 18 (of Huldah).

<sup>28</sup> Williams, §516; J-M §167k. According to J-M the use of לֹלֵאִי with the participle (נֹשֵׂא) or other nominal clauses is rare.

<sup>29</sup> Here the *qatal* of עָמַד is treated as a stative verb. The phrase עָמַדְתִּי לְפָנָיו is found only in the mouth of Elijah (1 Kgs 17.1; 18.15 and Elisha 3.14; 5.15).

separate from the utterance itself.<sup>30</sup> Elisha's statement 'constitutes an event' at both the level of direct discourse and narrative.<sup>31</sup> Not 'seeing' Jehoram is exactly what occurs at the narrative level since with the designation, 'king of Israel,' he becomes anonymous throughout chapters 4.1-8.15. Not only would Jehoram be invisible to Elisha were Jehoshaphat not present, he will be invisible to us once the story informs us that 'they returned to the land' (v.27). In fact, Jehoram's name is not used after Jehoshaphat's statement of identity in 3.7b. Yet within the larger narrative section, in which the king of Israel is effectively side-lined, both prophet and deity are known by fuller, and yet for Kings, rarer titular descriptions יהוה זְבָאוֹת and אֱלִישֶׁע בֶּן-שָׁפָט respectively.<sup>32</sup>

The narrative itself points to the fulfilment of Elisha's oracle. There is both a distinction and a co-operation to be made between the actions of YHWH (v.18a)<sup>33</sup> and the actions of the kings. The first part of v.18, וַנִּקַּל זֹאת בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, is appositional, referring back to the recently completed statement and the ease with which YHWH will create pools, while the second part, וַנִּתֵּן אֶת-מוֹאָב בְּיַדְכֶם, becomes a reality only as the kings fulfil the commands of v.19. The validity of this distinction is apparent even in the 'ease' with which YHWH's part is immediately reported:

וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר כַּעֲלוֹת הַמִּנְחָה וַיְהִי-מִים בָּאִים מִדְּרֹךְ אֲדוֹם וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֶת-הַמִּים:

<sup>30</sup> There is an evident tension between Elisha's seemingly positive evaluation of Jehoshaphat and the overall narrative emphasis which portrays negatively the co-operation of Judean kings with the Omrides. C. T. Begg argues that Elisha's acceptance of this co-operation was recognised by the Chronicler and was the reason for his exclusion of Elisha ('The Chronicler's non-mention of Elisha,' *BN* 45 (1988) 7-11.

<sup>31</sup> H. C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6. White argues in chapter 1 for the validity of this distinction. He states: 'A distinction has to be made at the outset between the act of narrating as evidenced in the narrative framework, and the utterance internal to the narrative' (p.9). Berlin, *Poetics*, 105 calls this 'the more sophisticated technique of embedded evaluation.'

<sup>32</sup> אֱלִישֶׁע בֶּן-שָׁפָט is found at 1 Kgs 19.16, 19; 2 Kgs 3.11; 6.31 while יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת is found in Kings only at 1 Kgs 18.15 and 2 Kgs 3.14.

<sup>33</sup> Following Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 45 which attributes the action to YHWH and makes the wadi the subject of the infinitive absolute. A similar use of the infinitive absolute is found at 4.43. The form is taken as an imperative by J-M §123u and rather confusingly by WOC as both an imperative §35.5.1a (*Make* this valley full of ditches...) and elsewhere (§7.4.1) as a finite verb (*I will make* this wadi...). However see 5.10 where the infinitive absolute has an imperatival sense.

And it came about in the morning when the grain offering was offered up and behold water coming from the way of Edom. And the land became filled with the water (2 Kgs 3.20).

What follows on is a reversal of the king of Israel's complaint: YHWH has called the three kings together and rather than a lack of water leading to the kings being given into Moab's hand, YHWH will actually use water not only to provide drink, but also to give Moab into their hand, provided they follow through with Elisha's commands. This they actually do as the four objects of that prior command (cities, trees, springs, land, v.19) become the four objects of Israel's actions (cities, land, springs, trees, vv.24-25). One is tempted to charge them with negligence in their leaving of Kir Hareseth (v.25b). However, even this city is not left unharmed since the narrative continues: 'the slingers surrounded and struck it' (v.25b). All the evidence in the text suggests that Elisha's commands were fulfilled.

So why then did the besieging army withdraw?<sup>34</sup> No explicit answer is given to this perplexing question. Moab is literally placed within Israel's grasp. Clearly the king of Moab is in a situation so hopeless and so desperate that he sacrifices his son upon the wall (v.27a). Yet Israel's withdrawal is described as a rather mundane affair (וַיָּסֶעוּ מִעָלְיָיו וַיָּשׁבוּ לְאֶרֶץ, v.27b), completely void of the kind of panicked flight previously characteristic of Moab (v.24). This description of Israel's orderly withdrawal is problematic whether the קָצַף-גְּדוֹלַל עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל is divine or human. Put another way, the 'great wrath' seems incompatible with the description of the withdrawal.<sup>35</sup> It is here that the leadership of Israel, particularly the king of Israel as the instigator of the coalition, is given a negative portrayal placing him in something of a dilemma. If he was responsible for issuing the order to withdraw we may ask

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<sup>34</sup> J. B. Burns, 'Why did the Besieging Army Withdraw?,' *ZAW* 102 (1990) 187-94.

<sup>35</sup> Unless perhaps the wrath is Israel's. Given the fact that '[t]his clause is one of the most perplexing items in Scripture' (Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 47), a satisfactory treatment will require a full length essay in itself. For the present, we note that the source of the קָצַף-גְּדוֹלַל may be either divine (Chemosh or YHWH) or human (Edomite, Moabite, or Israelite). The answer at which one arrives must take into consideration the exegetical and literary issues of the entire narrative as well as the linguistic questions surrounding the קָצַף-גְּדוֹלַל. YHWH is the subject of קָצַף everywhere in the Hebrew Bible except at Hos 10.7; Qoh 5.16; and Esth 1.18. The particular phrase קָצַף-גְּדוֹלַל is found at Deut 29.27; 2 Kgs 3.27; Jer 21.5; 32.37; Zech 1.15; 7.12.

how it is possible that having come so close to obtaining his military objective he turns back at just that moment when the attack should have been pressed.<sup>36</sup> If he was not responsible for issuing the order than who was? To whom has he abdicated his authority? Either way, as a force within the narrative, the kings (Israelite, Judahite or Edomite for that matter) are non-existent after the king of Israel's indictment of YHWH in v.15.

### 2 Kings 8.16-29: Further evidence of identity breakdown

Further support for the wider argument is found in chapter 8 within the regnal formula of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat. As noted previously, one does not encounter the names of the kings of Israel nor Judah from 2 Kgs 3.14 onward, but in chapter 8.16-29 there is an eruption of names and an explicit attempt by the narrator to grey the edges between north and south. Beside the confusion surrounding the names themselves, Joram (יֹרָם, v.16a) and Jehoram (יְהוֹרָם, v.16b), the explicit narrator tells us that Jehoram (here the Judahite king), 'walked in the way of the king of Israel as the house of Ahab had done' (v. 18a).<sup>37</sup> This is the first Judahite king to be compared unfavourably with Ahab's house. The marriage of Jehoram to a daughter of Ahab is pointed to as the cause of this downfall (כִּי בַת-אָחָב הָיְתָה-לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה, v.18b).

The confusion of names, the ties with Ahab's family, and the religious practices of Ahab's house do not end with Jehoram of Judah but continue with Ahaziah who follows his father to the throne (v.25). The narrator provides several other lineal details that serve notice to the blending of north and south. Ahaziah of Judah had a mother named Athaliah who was a daughter (granddaughter?) of Omri (בַּת-עֲמֹרִי, v.26b). This king also 'walked in the way of the house of Ahab' and 'did evil in the eyes of YHWH like the house of Ahab' since, he too was a son-in-law (קָהָן, v.27) of

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<sup>36</sup> It is important to keep in mind, as Burns does, that the whole point of the expedition was to stifle Moab's rebellion ('Besieging Army,' 188).

<sup>37</sup> Berlin, calls this kind of narration 'external' as compared with the nuanced 'embedded' narration. External narration is common in the book of Kings (*Poetics*, 105).

Ahab. Thus, these narrative segments treating the kings of the north and south sit either side of the Elisha narratives of chapter 4-8 with royal names that mirror one another:

**Ahaziah** (Israel, 2 Kgs 1) ----- **Jehoram** (Israel, 2 Kgs 3)

**Elisha** (chaps. 4-8)

**Jehoram** (Judah, 2 Kgs 8) ----- **Ahaziah** (Judah, 2 Kgs 8)

The murder of **Jehoram** of Israel and **Ahaziah** of Judah (2 Kgs 9)

Before turning from the theme of royal identity and the narrative-merging of kingdoms to the stories within chapters 4-8, where the king of Israel is anonymous and the prophet's actions pre-eminent, there is one last piece of evidence to examine. The text upon which our present discussion is based (8:16-29) stands on the brink of Elisha's return to the stage and the anointing of Jehu. The destruction of the house of Ahab and the near extinction of David's line lurk on the horizon: Jehu will kill both Jehoram (9:24) and Ahaziah (9:27). Just prior to this the narrator makes sure we understand how close to one another Jehoram and Ahaziah really are. Notice, for example, how vv. 27 and 28 reflect each other:

He [Ahaziah] walked in the way of the house of Ahab... (8:27)

He [Ahaziah] went with Joram son of Ahab... (8:28)

וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּדַרְךְ בֵּית אָחָז  
וַיֵּלֶךְ אִת־יֹרָם בֶּן־אָחָז

The placing of these statements back to back serves to emphasise the unity of the kings of Israel and Judah. Along with this the narrator provides one last summary of names and places that serve to bring to mind a whole host of previously related events within the northern prophetic narratives. M. Garsiel in several recent works explores what he calls Midrashic Name Derivations.<sup>38</sup> While he provides numerous

<sup>38</sup> M. Garsiel, 'Midrashic Name Derivations in Elijah and Elisha's Stories' [sic], in B. Z. Lurie (ed.), *Gevariyahu Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1989), 149-155 [Hebrew]; id., *Midrashic Name Derivations in the Bible* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1987); id., *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1991); id., 'Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2,' *Biblica* 72 (1991) 379-386.

examples related to the Elisha narratives, one in particular bears directly on our question. In a discussion of place names and their links with sound or sense, Garsiel cites 8.28-29 as a passage which he claims ‘stands out strikingly.’<sup>39</sup>

וילך את־יורם בן־אחאב למלחמה עם־חזהאל מלך־ארם  
 ברמת גלעד ויכו ארמים את־יורם  
 וישב יורם המלך להתרפא ביזרעאל מן־המכים  
 אשר יכּוּ ארמים ברמה בהלחמו את־חזהאל מלך ארם  
 ואחזיהו בן־יהורם מלך יהודה ירד לראות את־יורם בן אחאב

And he went with **Joram** (*ywr̄m*) the son of Ahab to war with Hazael king of **Aram** (*ʾrm̄*) at **Ramoth** (*b-rmw̄t*)-Gilead; and the **Arameans** (*ʾr̄mym*) wounded **Joram** (*ywr̄m*). And King **Joram** (*ywr̄m*) returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the **Arameans** (*ʾr̄mym*) had given him in **Ramah** (*b-rmh*), when he fought against Hazael king of **Aram** (*ʾrm̄*). And Ahaziah son of **Jehoram** (*yhw̄rm*) king of Judah went down to see **Joram** (*ywr̄m*) son of Ahab...<sup>40</sup>

Like a dam unable to hold back the surge any longer, this passage overflows with Joram’s name. The narrator could have used the more generic ‘king of Israel’, but instead calls him by name four times in the span of two verses. The collection of references to war with Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-Gilead, the notice of Joram’s injury, his return to Jezreel to recover from wounds and his accompaniment by a king of Judah, bring to mind numerous allusions: Elisha’s prediction of Hazel’s actions; Ahab’s wounding by Arameans at Ramoth Gilead; Ahaziah’s injury in chapter 1; the ill Ben-Hadad in chapter 8; and the military alliances with Jehoshaphat both in 1 Kgs 22 and 2 Kgs 3. It is also in 8.29 (and its repetition in 9.15) that the phrase **יורם המלך** occurs. Recall that here we have, in short compass, two of only five instances where ‘PN the king’ occurs within in the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore rather striking that the form ‘the king PN’ occurs several hundred times, but we find only **המלך יהורם** designating a king of Israel (3.6) just before the point in which he becomes merely the ‘king of Israel’. It is also curious that when we finally read his name after extended narrative anonymity, it comes like the breaking of a dam in the rare

<sup>39</sup> Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 229.

<sup>40</sup> Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 229. I have underlined those Hebrew words which are in boldface in Garsiel’s text.

syntagm יִזְרָם הַמֶּלֶךְ (8.29). Here it is used to emphasise Jehoram's return to Jezreel to recover from his injuries.

Admittedly the evidence adduced is somewhat selective and far from conclusive. We are merely attempting to ascertain some relationship between 2 Kings 4-8 and the chapters which surround it. If the interpretation above is at least plausible we may have in weak kings, political alliances and the loss of royal identity the 'glasses' through which to view the narratives of 4.1-8.15 in which Elisha plays a large part. Not surprisingly, the king disappears altogether from 2 Kgs 4, a chapter in which arguably, Elisha most mimics both king and deity.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE FEEDING AND HEALING PROPHET: KINGLY AND DIVINE RE-PRESENTATION IN 2 KINGS 4 AND 5

#### 2 Kings 4: Signs of blessing among faithful Israel

Thus far we have examined the broader and immediate contexts within which the stories of chapters 4-8 have been placed. Ahaziah, Ahab's immediate successor, is dead and Jehoram, whom we discover in chapter 3 is Ahaziah's brother, has been significantly slighted in his meeting with Elisha. Having told us of Elisha's disregard for the person of Jehoram, the narrator of chapter 4 proceeds to ignore the king completely. Why is this so?

It has been noted above that the miracle stories provide a conundrum for the problem of literary coherence both because they are ill-suited to their context and because the miracles themselves appear so pointless. This is perfectly understandable given a view that the stories are late additions or perhaps lifted from a prior prophetic source.<sup>1</sup> Long notes the difficulty of discerning the intention of DtrH's use of the stories in 2 Kgs 4 which 'accent' Elisha within the reign of Jehoram. He suggests that perhaps, despite an apostate monarch and people, the DtrH wanted to emphasise the availability of God's power in and through the successor of Elijah, i.e., since there is still a prophet in Israel there is still a God in Israel as well.<sup>2</sup> This is in fact not far from the emphasis of 2 Kgs 5 and so it is appropriate to treat the two chapters together. However, the question of their literary function in the midst of Kings remains. Given our prior discussion about context, is it possible to read the narratives of 4-8 as an implicit indictment on the monarchy and its failed leadership and the elevation of a prophetic figure to new heights?

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 491 notes that in this section Elisha is not quite so associated with the prophetic guild. This along with linguistic elements (e.g., increased Aramaisms) and Elisha's status, 'have suggested a different source from the anecdotes of Elisha and the sons of the prophets'. The qualification of this view, hinted at by Gray, must be strengthened given the connections of the sons of the prophets in 4.1-7 and 4.38-41.

<sup>2</sup> Long, *2 Kings*, 65.

Several themes stand out within the narratives of 2 Kings 4. Overall the chapter contains several healing stories that are framed on either side by stories of abundant provision:

- 2 Kgs 4.1-7: Elisha **provides** abundance of oil for sons of the prophets widow
- 2 Kgs 4.8-37: Elisha **heals** both the Shunammite and her son
- 2 Kgs 4.38-41: Elisha **heals** the poisoned stew for sons of the prophets
- 2 Kgs 4.42-44: Elisha **provides** abundance of bread for the people<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have long noted the differing groups of people with whom Elisha associates himself. Indeed it is the prophet's changing interactions with these varying groups that contributes to the view that the chapters have little relationship with one another.<sup>4</sup> P. Buis notes the difficulty of establishing a 'principle of composition' for the narratives. He still makes the attempt to discern an order in the present arrangement of stories, claiming that they must be grouped according to typology.<sup>5</sup> He proceeds to categorise them as A) Elisha the benefactor – stories in which the prophet uses his miraculous powers in service to others: 2.19-22; 4.1-7; 4.38-44; 6.1-7; 8.1-2; 13.20-21; B) Elisha and his servant: 4.8-37; 5.1-27; 6.8-23; C) Elisha in the political sphere – here Elisha as the successor of Elijah, instigates revolutions: 2 Kgs 8.7-15; 9.1ff; D) Elisha in warfare: 3.4-27; 6.24-7.20; 13.14-19; E) Biographical notices: 2.23-25; 8.3-6; 13.20.<sup>6</sup> Buis then notes the following arrangement for the stories from chapters 2-8:<sup>7</sup>

A(4.1-7)	B(4.8-37)	A(4.38-44)	B(5.1-27)	A(6.1-7)	B(6.8-23)
	D(3.4-27)				D(6.24-7.20)
AE(2.19-22)(2.23-25)					AE(8.1.2)(8.3-6)

<sup>3</sup> However see N. Levine, 'Twice as Much of Your Spirit: Pattern, Parallel, and Paronomasia in the Miracles of Elijah and Elisha,' *JSOT* 85 (1999) 25-46 (29) who claims that the four key elements of these stories, viz., food (vv.1-7), death (vv.8-37), food and death (vv.38-41), and food (42-44) are the elements also found in the Elijah stories only 'more interwoven.'

<sup>4</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 59 claim that the stories in chapter four are held together by Elisha's wonder-working acts on behalf of his admirers.

<sup>5</sup> P. Buis, *Le Livre des Rois* (Paris: Librairie LeCoffre, 1997), 187.

<sup>6</sup> Buis, *Rois*, 187.

<sup>7</sup> Buis actually creates a chart for chapters 2-13 inclusive. We have 'magnified' his treatment of chapters 2-8 since they are our chief concern and added the related texts.

This is a fine attempt to create an overall compositional structure for chapters 2-8 and perhaps the best we have seen. Still, there is usually some artificiality about such structures and the attempt by Buis is no different.<sup>8</sup>

While appreciating the usefulness of the above diagram, we would like to be a little more general. Stories in which Elisha moves amidst the common folk are distinguished from those in which he is involved in the great political events of the day. This contrast is exemplified in the narrative shift from the great political events of chapter 3, to the prophet among the common folk in chapter 4. This is not the only place where such a shift occurs. Stretching back to 2 Kgs 1, the narrative moves broadly from prophetic interaction with royal and political situations or figures to interaction with non-royal figures.<sup>9</sup>

<u>Text</u>	<u>Royal/Political Figure(s)</u>	<u>Non-Royal Figure(s)</u>
1.1-18	Ahaziah	
2.1-25		Elijah / sons of prophets, et. al.
3.1-27	Jehoram / Jehoshaphat	
4.1-44		Sons of the prophets, et.al.
5.1-27	Naaman / king of Israel	
6.1-7		Sons of the prophets
6.8-7.20	King of Israel / Arameans	
8.1-6	King of Israel	Shunammite / Gehazi

Elisha interacts in pendulum fashion with these two groups until their ultimate convergence in 8.1-6, a story in which the prophet himself is not actually present within the narrative and yet the king of Israel is very interested in hearing from Gehazi about 'all the great things Elisha has done' (8.4b).

In the treatment that follows we will deal first with the shorter stories, the so-called prophetic *legenda* of 4.1-7, 38-41 and 42-44, before turning to the longer tale

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<sup>8</sup> For example we could question the decision to split chapter 8.1-6 into two parts in order to make in fit the scheme. Here 8.1-2 is classed as 'Elisha the benefactor' (A) while 8.3-6 is classed as a 'biographical notice' (E). This is particularly questionable since both the Shunammite and Gehazi are present in 8.1-6 and have previously been categorised as stories of 'Elisha and his servant' (C).

<sup>9</sup> The adverb 'broadly' is used since the presence of one group does not necessarily exclude that of the other. For example, Elisha interacts with the political figures like the king of Israel and Naaman in 2 Kgs 5 but also with Gehazi. This is so also for 2 Kgs 6.8-23 where the 'servant of the man of God' is involved. Our more general treatment is no less artificial than Buis' more specific structure.

of the Shunammite in vv.8-37. Within the shorter narratives Elisha provides an abundance of materials basic to life. Along with the earlier provision of abundant water (3.16-17) the narratives in chapter 4 present oil that continues, provided there is a jar available in which to collect it (4.1-7); and bread enough to feed one hundred such that some remains after everyone has been fed (4.42-44). All five instances of *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* uttered by Elisha within chapters 2-8 are concerned with either the provision of abundant water (3.16,17), bread (4.43), or grains (7.1). The fifth instance occurs at 2.21 and will be considered below.

Only once, in response to the famine in the land (*וַהֲרַעֲב בְּאֶרֶץ*, v.38), does the narrator explicitly portray Elisha himself providing food or drink for the sons of the prophets (4.38-41). In this instance the prophet commands his servant to prepare a meal:

*וַיֹּאמֶר לְנַעֲרוֹ שִׁפְתֵי הַסִּיר הַגָּדוֹלָה וּבִשְׁלֵ נָזִיד לְבָנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים*  
 And he said to his servant, 'Set on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets' (2 Kgs 4.38b).

In v.40 the stew is 'poured out' (*וַיִּצְקוּ*) only to have those eating 'cry out' (*וַיִּצְעֻקוּ*), 'Death in the pot, O man of God!' (*מָוֶת בַּסִּיר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים*), due to some questionable ingredients introduced by one of their company.<sup>10</sup> The importance of the verb *צִעַק* for the narratives and the royal portrayal of Elisha will be dealt with in our treatment of the siege of Samaria below (2 Kgs 6.24-7.20). Of interest presently are several lexical connections, one with an earlier narrative and one with a story that follows (4.42-44).

In an earlier tale (2 Kgs 2.19-22) Elisha commanded the men of the city to bring (*קָחוּ*, 2.20) him a new bowl containing salt, which ingredient the prophet proceeds to cast (*וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ*) into the spring. The occurrence of the phrase *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* is found in 2.21 and is followed by YHWH's promise:

*...וַיִּפְאֲתֵי לַמַּיִם הָאֵלֶּה לֹא-יְהִיָּה מָוֶת עוֹד וּמִשְׁכָּלָת*  
 I heal these waters: neither death nor miscarriage shall come from there again. (2 Kgs 2.21b).

<sup>10</sup> *פִּקְעוֹת* (v.39) is hapax legomenon. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 58 here translate 'bitter apples'.

Similarly, in 4.38-41 the prophet requests flour (וּקְחוּ-קֶמַח, v.41a) which he then casts into the pot (וַיִּשְׂלֹךְ אֶל-הַסִּיר, v.41b). The results are the same as in each instance as death (מָוֶת) is robbed of its supposed prey.<sup>11</sup> In view of the similarities, the story of the blighted stew, like the story of the water in 2.19-22, may be viewed as a story of healing. As Elisha heals the waters near Jericho so he also heals the stew. If these are to be read as healing stories then we find, in both, stories which merge the features of healing and the provision of food (water, soup) into brief compass.

The theme of feeding the sons of the prophets continues in the story that follows in 4.42-44. Again the recipients of the prophetic favour are most likely the sons of the prophets as well, even though the phrase is not explicitly used.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the earlier story the prophet casts flour into the pot and follows with the command 'pour out for the people so that they may eat' (צַק לָעָם וַיֹּאכְלוּ, v.41b). The stew ordered earlier for the 'sons of the prophets' (4.38b) is eventually poured out 'for the people'. Similarly, in the story that follows, Elisha twice commands the man from Baal Shalishah (מִבְּעַל שְׁלִישָׁה, v.42) to 'give to the people so that they may eat' (תֵּן לָעָם וַיֹּאכְלוּ, vv. 42b, 43b).<sup>13</sup> The narratives encourage the association of 'the people' in 42b, 43b with the sons of the prophets. Overall, the stories build upon and interact with one another such that they provide all that is needed for the making of bread: a new bowl with salt (2.20), clean water (2.21b), oil (4.6), flour (4.41), and eventually enough bread such that the people may eat and have some left over (4.43).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 175 sees both the salt of 2.21 and the flour of 4.41 as a symbol of life. Hobbs, 2 *Kings*, 53 asserts that 'death in the pot' cannot be taken literally but is a reaction to the heinous mixture they have just tasted. However, Cogan and Tadmor, envisioning the same gourd as Hobbs, claims that it 'has been known to be fatal' (*II Kings*, 58).

<sup>12</sup> Provan, *Kings*, 188.

<sup>13</sup> The form וַיֹּאכְלוּ is the so-called *weyiqtol* or simple waw plus imperfect. For its use in a purpose clause see F. T. Kelly, 'The Imperfect with Simple Waw in Hebrew,' *JBL* 39 (1920) 1-23 (11).

<sup>14</sup> L. Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics against Baal Worship*, Pretoria Oriental Series 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 83-84 argues that miracles of grain and oil performed by Elijah and Elisha contrast the power of YHWH to provide with the power of Baal to provide.

But what has Elisha's distribution of cereal to do with the concept of kingship? We would argue that in these minor stories the prophet's actions again hint at the assumption of the royal task of the provision of food. In several instances in the Hebrew Bible we find kings, or those granted the authority of kings, providing bread or grains for the people. For example, both David (2 Sam 6.19//1 Chr 16.3) and Joseph (Gen chapters 41, 47) provide for people in this manner.<sup>15</sup> In Elisha's case, the provision moves beyond merely mimicking royal actions to actually critiquing them. Discussing Elisha's penchant for providing grains in 2 Kgs 4, Grottanelli observes: 'The prophets are guarantors of abundance (II Kings 4) and defenders of property (II Kings 8), while kings threaten property (1 Kings 21) and are incapable of guaranteeing abundance (II Kings 6:25-27).'<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to read Elisha's actions here in a negative light since the prophetic provision of grain contrasts with Omride kings who either do not or cannot provide foodstuffs, or worse, actually remove property from their subjects (as with Naboth's vineyard).<sup>17</sup>

This line of inquiry raises an interesting question with respect to the final story in chapter 4: Why does the man from Baal-Shalishah bring לָחֶם בַּכִּנֹּרִים to Elisha? The phrase presents difficulties for Bergen who wishes to see in the Elisha stories a critique of prophetism.<sup>18</sup> It is also interesting to explore the attempts of commentators

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter 2, 'Religious Ideals and the Distribution of Cereal Grains in the Hebrew Bible,' in C. Grottanelli, *Kings and Prophets: Monarchic Power, Inspired Leadership and Sacred Text in Biblical Narrative* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31-45. This is not to say that the purpose of the provision of grain or bread is the same in all cases. Grottanelli notes that in David's case the ideological emphasis is not on the distribution of food to the hungry but on a festival tied to the return of the ark (p. 32). Likewise, he believes that Joseph is not necessarily interested in saving lives but on gaining 'total domination and total ownership over the land and the people' for the sake of the palace which he serves (p.34). Grottanelli also treats the provision of grain by Boaz in Ruth 2, 4 as well as Hezekiah in 2 Chr 31.4-10.

<sup>16</sup> Grottanelli, *Kings and Prophets*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Grottanelli notes that in the fight against greedy monarchs or oppressors the biblical narrative offers as heroes those who are not kings. Often these non-monarchic figures are prophetic. For example, Deborah fights enemy kings and Elijah and Elisha 'offer their Israelite followers a miraculous distribution of cereal food' (p.6).

<sup>18</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 108 states that in this story 'all the right elements are in the right places.'

to deal with this oddity. Most seem puzzled by it.<sup>19</sup> There are those, however, who note the extraordinary nature of this act and make attempts to explain it. Auld, for example, rightly observes: ‘It is striking that he [Elisha] should have received such a dedication at all; for first fruits belonged to God, and were presented more immediately to his priests.’<sup>20</sup> In the earlier story of the Shunammite, Elisha is likewise spoken of in ways reserved for ‘cult personnel’.<sup>21</sup> Wiseman also notices this feature and questions whether Elisha’s acceptance and sharing of the gift ‘may indicate recognition of him as the LORD’s representative.’<sup>22</sup> Going even further, Bergen raises the possibility that since the first fruits should have been presented to YHWH perhaps ‘this is another indication that Elisha is taking the place of YHWH in the narrative?’<sup>23</sup> This is getting close to the heart of the matter, but the question remains as to why this representative of YHWH received such a gift when others did not? We will leave this question open for the moment.

The presence of the theme of healing is found not only in the healing of water that occurs in chapter 2, but also in the healing of the Shunammite and her son in chapter 4.8-37. The son’s healing in vv.32-35 is a very apparent aspect of healing within the

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<sup>19</sup> Of those commentators who actually address the question of the first fruits: Barnes, *Kings*, 203 cites Exod 23.19; 34.26 and states, ‘Such an offering was an appropriate one to make to a prophet’ but provides no reason why this is so; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 370 claim ‘not here a ritual term’; Robinson, *Kings*, 2:48-49 observes that if they are ritual offering of first fruits the man has brought them to the sanctuary where they are offered to Elisha as prophet-leader; Jones, *Kings*, 2:411 claims it likely refers to the first fruits offered to God which are either ‘appropriated’ by Elisha ‘to prepare a sacramental meal’ or brought to both prophets and priests; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 53 only observes the timing of the food with respect to the famine of the previously established context (v.38); Nelson, *Kings*, 175 believes it to be ‘in the nature of a religious offering’.

<sup>20</sup> Auld, *Kings*, 163.

<sup>21</sup> In speaking to her husband of Elisha she says, הַגְּדוּלָּהּ יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא (v.9a) about which Cogan and Tadmor observe that this is the only case where a prophet is spoken of as ‘holy’. The term elsewhere is applied to cult personnel, Nazarites, or Israel as a ‘kingdom of priests’ (*II Kings*, 56).

<sup>22</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*. TynOTC (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 205-06.

<sup>23</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 110. While admitting that this story clarifies the ‘connection’ between YHWH and Elisha, Bergen ultimately questions this connection because he questions the appropriateness of bringing firstfruits to the prophet.

story as the prophet stretches out on the body of the child in an act of identification that results in the boy's revivification:

וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל-הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּשֶׂם פִּיּוֹ עַל-פִּיּוֹ וְעֵינָיו עַל-עֵינָיו וְכַפָּיו עַל-כַּפָּיו

And he went up and lay upon the child and placed his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes and his palms upon his palms<sup>24</sup> ... (2 Kgs 4.34).

What is not so apparent is that the giving of the son is itself an act of healing on the part of the prophet. R. Neff in his examination of Gen 17-18 has pointed to some of the formal elements contained in healing stories. The narrative may portray the healing 'through a miracle-working word, a gesture or the laying on of hands, through the power of a name, or a prescribed act.'<sup>25</sup> Both Abraham (Gen 17.17) and Sarah (Gen 18.12) laugh, while the incredulity of the Shunammite is revealed in her plea to Elisha that he not lie to her (אֵל-הַכּוֹזֵב בְּשִׁפְחָתָהּ, 2 Kgs 4.16b).<sup>26</sup> As with Sarah and Abraham, in the Shunammite we observe disbelief in the face of divine promise. Neff comments: 'Derision directed to the one who proclaims healing is often a formal element in miracle narratives since the improbability of cure is cause for disbelief.'<sup>27</sup>

Features of several of these stories highlight other themes connecting them with chapter two and emphasise the appropriate response of faithful Israel to the prophet of YHWH.<sup>28</sup> The questions Elisha puts directly to the widow or indirectly to the Shunammite through Gehazi, are reflective of the query (command?) put to him by Elijah:

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<sup>24</sup> Reading the Qere.

<sup>25</sup> R. W. Neff, 'Saga,' in G. W. Coats, *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, JSOTSup 35 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 17-32 (27).

<sup>26</sup> Another possible link between the two stories is the rare קָעַר תִּיָּה an idiom found only at Gen 18.10, 14 and 2 Kgs 4.16, 17 (Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 57). R. Alter also holds that the Shunammite story 'alludes, with some limited citation of phrases, to Sarah's annunciation' 'How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene,' *Prooftexts* 3 (1983) 115-30 (129).

<sup>27</sup> Neff, 'Saga,' 28.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase 'faithful Israel' is used by Satterthwaite to contrast those faithful to Elisha and YHWH (e.g., 'sons of the prophets' and the Shunammite woman) with the wider Israel of the Northern Kingdom especially as represented by king Jehoram ('Elisha Narratives,' 8).

שאל מה אעשה לך בטרם אלקח ממך

'Ask what I may do for you before I am taken from you' (Elijah to Elisha, 2 Kgs 2.9).

ויאמר אליה אלישע מה אעשה לך

And Elisha said to her, 'What shall I do for you?' (Elisha to widow, 2 Kgs 4.2).

ויאמר לו אמר נא אליה הגת חרדת אלינו את כל החרדה הזאת מה לעשות לך

And he said to him, 'Please say to her, "Look at all this great worry you have shown for us. What is to be done for you?"' (Elisha to Gehazi, 2 Kgs 4.13).

Not only are the questions similar, but the response of the Shunammite at several points in the story mirrors the actions of previous characters. Her language duplicates the previous response of Elisha to Elijah's departure. The former claimed that he would allow no obstacle to come between him and his master, a sentiment echoed by the Shunammite. This connects the two responses, such that we should read the one in the light of the other. Elijah provides for Elisha as Elisha provides for the sons of the prophets: the reaction of the Shunammite exemplifies the appropriate response to the man of God:

חַי־יְהוָה וְחַי־נַפְשְׁךָ אִם־אֶעְזָבְךָ

'By the life of YHWH and by the life of your soul, I will not forsake you' (Elisha to Elijah, 2.2aβ, 4aβ, 6aβ).

וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־הַנֶּעַר חַי־יְהוָה וְחַי־נַפְשְׁךָ אִם־אֶעְזָבְךָ

And the mother of the child said, 'By the life of YHWH and by the life of your soul, I will not forsake you' (Shunammite to Elisha, 4.30).

The actions of the Shunammite toward Elisha are also similar to the actions of the sons of the prophets when they realise that Elisha is endowed with his mentor's spirit. Thus her words are reflective of those of Elisha, yet her deeds mirror the sons of the prophets. Although they had bowed to the ground before Elisha (וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ־לוֹ אַרְצָה, 2.15b), the Shunammite, herself an אִשָּׁה גְדוּלָה (4.8), exhibits at least an equal reverence for the prophet and may actually encourage us to see in her behaviour a response of even deeper reverence for the prophet because we are told that she 'fell upon his feet and bowed to the ground' (וַתִּפֹּל עַל־רַגְלָיו וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה, 4.37). As was argued previously, Elisha is the only non-royal figure in Kings to be afforded such treatment and the only prophet in the Hebrew Bible to be shown such

reverence. Why? Are we being asked to see in this prophet one who is more than just a prophet? A positive answer to this question will be argued in the next section. Narrative features within chapter 5 encourage a view of Elisha which sees him as something more than a prophet.

### 2 Kings 5: A critique of kings, a YHWH-like prophet and role reversal

From the interaction of Elisha with non-royal / non-political figures in chapter 4, the narrative returns in chapter 5 to a portrayal of the prophet among political and military leaders, and does so with great style.<sup>29</sup> Cohn suggests a three-fold structure focusing upon the central characters (Elisha vv.1-14; Naaman vv.15-19; Gehazi vv.20-27). Likewise Long's triptych consists of the background to the problem (vv.1-2), the resolution of the problem (vv.3-14) and the 'aftermath of cure' (vv.15-27).<sup>30</sup>

As with several of the previous stories, so in 2 Kgs 5.1 the narrative syntactically reveals its new subject matter by commencing with a *waw* + subject (וַיָּבֵא מֶלֶךְ-אַרָם) followed by a *qatal* (הָיָה). In keeping with the often understated quality of Hebrew narrative technique the author provides a quantity of information – sometimes shocking – by way of background detail that will play an important role in the story to follow.

For example, we learn in the opening verse that besides being the commander of the army of the king of Aram, Naaman was considered a 'great man' (אִישׁ גָּדוֹל) and held in high regard (וַיִּשָּׂא פָנָיו)<sup>31</sup> by his king. This is due to the surprising fact that through the warrior Naaman, YHWH had given 'victory in battle' to Aram (כִּי-בָּו נָתַן-יְהוָה תְּשׁוּבָה לְאַרָם).<sup>32</sup> This is a startling piece of information and a reminder of

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<sup>29</sup> This chapter is given extensive treatment in N. C. Baumgart, *Gott, Prophet und Israel: Eine synchrone und diachrone Auslegung der Naamanerzählung und ihrer Gehasiepisode (2 Kön 5)*, Erfurter theologische Studien 68 (Leipzig: Benno, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 35; Long, *2 Kings*, 66-67.

<sup>31</sup> For the occurrence of וַיִּשָּׂא פָנָיו elsewhere see Is 3.3; 9.14; Job 22. J-M §121o translates the clause, 'whose face is (well) received = for whom one has respect' and asserts that the noun following the passive participle is the logical subject. See also above at 2 Kgs 3.14.

<sup>32</sup> D. P. O'Brien, "'Is this the Time to Accept...?' (2 Kings V 26B): Simply Moralizing (LXX) or

the contextual importance of the military threat from Aram to the Elisha narratives. In fact the greater portion of the remainder of the stories from 5.1-8.15 will be dedicated completely to this theme in one form or another, broken only by the shorter stories of 6.1-7 and 8.1-6. Before proceeding it may be valuable to pause and consider how this relates to our earlier discussion.

Previously we observed how Jehoshaphat is depicted as a king who identified himself and his people first with Ahab and then later with Ahab's son Jehoram. In that context we also briefly discussed 1 Kgs 20, another chapter in which Ahab is frequently labelled with the generic 'king of Israel'. In 1 Kgs 20 the prophetic oracle against Ahab is given (interestingly enough, from an anonymous prophet in disguise) because Ahab had allowed Ben-Hadad to live even though YHWH had placed this king of Aram under his ban (אִישׁ־חַרְמִי, 20.42b). The oracle, 'And it shall be your life on behalf of his life and your people on behalf of his people' (1 Kgs 20.42), foreshadows a dramatic reversal of fortune implying a swapping of the people of Israel for the people of Aram. In view of the startling fact that his commander has been given victory over Israel, Ben-Hadad, once on the *ḥērem* list, now in 2 Kgs 5 appears to have found favour with YHWH.<sup>33</sup> It is not so easy to extricate Judah from this change of fortune given the narrator's earlier attempts to merge the two kingdoms. This raises the question of whether the elevation of Aram at the expense of Israel may also foreshadow the ultimate rejection of Judah.

While the victory in battle given through Naaman is an important and surprising piece of information, the narrator saves for the end of v.1 an even more shocking

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an Ominous Foreboding of Yahweh's Rejection of Israel (MT)?,' *VT* 46 (1996) 448-57. O'Brien (455 n.22) holds that *תְּשׁוּבָה* plus *נָתַן* should be translated with the stronger and more contextually accurate 'victory in battle' as opposed to a more general term like 'deliverance'. The evidence of other passages within the former prophets where a similar construction occurs supports this view. In each case YHWH is the subject of either *נָתַן* (Judg 15.18; 2 Kgs 5.1) or *עָשָׂה* (1 Sam 11.13; 19.5; 2 Sam 23.10,12) and the context is victory in battle. In keeping with our concern for coherence in these narratives it is worth noting O'Brien's observation that the question 'victory against whom?' is an appropriate one to ask since the narrative does not state it explicitly.

<sup>33</sup> O'Brien, "Is this the Time?," 455.

fact, and one that bears largely upon the story to follow: Naaman is ‘a mighty man, a leper’ (גבור תל מַצְרֵעַ).<sup>34</sup> Verse two immediately contrasts his strength, position, and knowledge with that of a small girl (נַעֲרָה קְטַנָּה) from the land of Israel whom the ‘raiding bands’ (גְּדוּדִים)<sup>35</sup> from Aram had taken captive (וַיִּשְׁבּוּ). When viewed together it is rather bizarre that the mighty man and all the machinations of Aram’s ‘raiding bands’ can only seize a young child. Although merely a servant-girl, she tells her mistress that if only<sup>36</sup> Naaman were ‘before the prophet who is in Samaria’ (לְפָנַי הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁמְרֹון) (v.3) his leprosy would be removed.

In concluding the treatment of 2 Kgs 4 it was claimed that in 2 Kgs 5 Elisha is portrayed as something more than a prophet. This is observed primarily in the rhetorical questions expressed by the king of Israel and Elisha near the beginning and end of the narrative. With these questions the narrator provides us with implicit commentary regarding his view of the king and the prophet. Without saying so explicitly, he elevates the position of the prophet and in keeping with the overall thrust of the Elisha narratives, he indicts the king and indeed the concept of kingship within Israel.

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<sup>34</sup> We translate מַצְרֵעַ with the substantive ‘leper.’ As is well known the Hebrew מַצְרֵעַ is not equivalent to today’s leprosy (Hansen’s disease) but covers a multitude of skin diseases.

<sup>35</sup> These ‘bands’ or ‘troops’ are found at 1 Kgs 11.24; 2 Kgs 5.2; 6.23; 13.20, 21; 24.2 (4x) and are often sent by YHWH in response to royal unfaithfulness. The first instance in 11.24 finds its immediate context in the raising up of Rezon as an adversary (וַיִּשָּׂא, v.25) given in response to Solomon’s apostasy (1 Kgs 11.9-13). This information follows upon the introduction of Hadad the Edomite who is presented as the first of Solomon’s adversary’s also raised up by YHWH (1 Kgs 11.14-22). The final instances in are found in 2 Kgs 24.2 and describe the sending of raiders from Babylon, Aram, Moab, and Ammon during Jehoiakim’s reign. These were sent by YHWH ‘against Judah to destroy it’ (בַּיהוּדָה לְהַאֲבִידוֹ) (24.2aβ). Ultimately the cause of this action is traced back to the sins of Manasseh (24.3-4). We will take up the significance of these enemies in our concluding chapter.

<sup>36</sup> The interjection *Oh! if* (אֵיִלִּי) occurs only in 2 Kgs 5.3 and Ps 119.5. See J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson’s Introductory Hebrew Grammar Syntax*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994) §155b Rem 2.

## 2 Kings 5.4-19: The divine and royal prophet

Having gained permission from his lord to seek healing in Israel (v.5), Naaman is given a letter from the king of Aram to deliver to the king of Israel asking the king of Israel to remove Naaman's leprosy (וְאֶסְפְּחוּ מִצְרַעְתּוֹ, v.6bβ). Why does Naaman seek an audience with the king of Israel when he is told that healing comes from the prophet in Samaria? One could argue that as a high foreign official he simply follows routine diplomatic procedure. Perhaps there is some hint that he was not detailed enough in reporting to the king of Aram the words of the child (בְּזֹאת וְכֹזֶאת דְּבַרְהָ הַנְּעָרָה, v.4). Regardless of Naaman's report to his own king, it is clear that the king of Israel sees more than just a visit from a foreign diplomat. He envisions sinister motives behind this visit as he had posited sinister motives to YHWH the last time we heard him speak (2 Kgs 3.13b):

הֲאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי לְהַמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת כִּי־זֶה שֶׁלַח אֵלַי לְאַסֹּף אִישׁ מִצְרַעְתּוֹ כִּי אֶדְדַּע־נָא וְרָאוּ כִּי־מִתְאַנֶּה הוּא לִי  
'Am I God to cause death and to make alive that this one sends to me to remove leprosy from a man? For surely you must know and see that he himself seeks a quarrel with me' (2 Kgs 5.7).

By means of the king's reading (בִּקְרָא) of the communiqué and the rending (וַיִּקְרַע) of his clothes, the narrator emphasises the 'impotence of royal authority.'<sup>37</sup> The phrase לְהַמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת occurs only here in the OT, although there are other instances (Deut 32.29; 1 Sam 2.6) where מוֹת and חַיָּה are used together of YHWH's power over life and death.<sup>38</sup> The narrative immediately contrasts the actions of the prophet with those of the king.

וַיְהִי כִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַסֵּפֶר וַיִּקְרַע בְּגָדָיו  
And it came about when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes...(2 Kgs 5.7a)

וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֱלִישָׁע אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־קָרַע מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּגָדָיו  
And it came about when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes...(2 Kgs 5.8a)

<sup>37</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 37. Cohn nicely points out the Massoretic *pisqā*<sup>2</sup> and the blank space signalling the cessation of narrative motion (cf. v.14).

<sup>38</sup> The prose of 2 Kgs 5.7 uses two hifil infinitive constructs. In Deut 32.39 the verbs are two *yiqtol* forms אָמַית וְאַחֲתָה (hifil followed by piel) and the 1 Sam 2.6 passage a hifil ptc (מִמִּית) followed by a piel ptc (מִתְחִיה). These latter two passages are poetic. The significance of the piel / hifil distinction will be addressed in our treatment of 2 Kgs 8.1-6.

Whereas the king bemoans the fact that Ben-hadad sends (שִׁלַּח) Naaman to him to be healed, Elisha now ‘sends’ (וַיִּשְׁלַח) to the king of Israel requesting that Naaman come to him. It appears that Naaman, his wife, and the reader all know in theory what the narrator wants them to know in practice, namely that there is a prophet in Israel who can heal, a fact which the king of Israel ought to know if Elisha’s words to him are any indication.

לָמָּה קָרַעְתָּ בְּגָדֶיךָ יְבֹא־נָא אֵלַי וַיָּדַע כִּי יֵשׁ נָבִיא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me so that he will know that there is a prophet in Israel. (2 Kgs 5.8b)

What are some of the implications of Elisha’s offer and what does the question and offer say about both prophet and king? First, with these utterances Elisha couches his accusation in the form of a question.<sup>39</sup> As with earlier interactions between king and prophet in 2 Kgs 1, paraphrasing Elisha’s question – ‘Is there no prophet in Israel that you need to tear your garments?’ – may not be too far off of the mark; often the violated norm is not stated explicitly. Rosenblum states: ‘It seems reasonable that at least in the public domain people rarely level their criticism straightforwardly’.<sup>40</sup> Elisha clearly expects more of the king of Israel than the king provides and in so doing the prophet points out the king’s failure. Rosenblum reaches the conclusion

that questions which ask about futures and make recommendations, and questions which simultaneously ask for opinions and discredit those opinions are reasonably construed as accusatory. Accusations may be accomplished by an attribution of power joined to a recommendation, or by an attribution of expertise coupled with description which specifically denies the possibility of expertise.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Karen E. Rosenblum, ‘When is a Question an Accusation?’, *Semiotica* 65 (1987) 143-56.

<sup>40</sup> Rosenblum, ‘Question,’ 144. Rosenblum analyses the transcripts of press conferences from 1973-74 and the questions put to U. S. President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal.

<sup>41</sup> Rosenblum, ‘Question,’ 153.

Elisha's recommendation following upon his question denies the king of Israel's power to effect the change Naaman seeks. Stated differently, Elisha addresses his question to one who should have known better.

Second, within the narrative the king of Israel's own question, 'Am I God to cause death and to make alive...?', is met by the prophet's response 'let him come to me'. While it is unlikely that a narrator would have a prophet of YHWH give a positive answer to the question 'Am I a God?', the request that Naaman be sent to the prophet suggests that Elisha can back up his words with actions and so the king is instructed to send the problem case to the prophet. The latter clearly equates 'healing' with 'making alive' and reveals his presupposition that the one who heals manifests divine qualities.<sup>42</sup> Is Elisha being portrayed here as some kind of god, or at least a prophet who has taken over the royal task of healing often associated with kings? Elisha himself refuses to speak directly to Naaman but instead communicates through a messenger. Cohn holds that some aspects of the portrayal of Elisha are royal:

Elisha displays courtly behavior by first summoning Naaman and then communicating with him through an intermediary...The author implicitly contrasts the impotent king with the confident prophet who, unlike the king, actually exercises royal authority.<sup>43</sup>

Grottanelli observes that that the king in Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies was 'both during his life and after his death, a "healer" and a "savior"'.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, in Israel, the role of the king 'ultimately coincided with the ancient Near Eastern pattern' although this was given a somewhat different expression.<sup>45</sup> In this respect, if Elisha is being given a royal portrayal, it is not surprising that even in his

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<sup>42</sup> *TDOT* 4:337 in a discussion of 2 Kgs 5.7.

<sup>43</sup> Cohn, 'Form and Perspective,' 176-77.

<sup>44</sup> C. Grottanelli, 'Healers and Saviors of the Eastern Mediterranean in Preclassical Times,' in *Kings and Prophets*, 127-145 (127). Grottanelli is quick to note that both the 'saving' and 'sacred' quality of Near Eastern royal ideology is a hotly debated subject (127). The essay is a reproduction with some corrections, of Grottanelli's earlier article of the same title in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (eds.), *La Soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero Romano* (Brill: Leiden, 1982), 649-670. The citations are from the revised article in *Kings and Prophets* unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>45</sup> So G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, 190. This 'different expression' was as 'covenant administrator'.

death he is able to heal (2 Kgs 13.21). Hosea 5.13-6.2 also lends some support to the idea that kings were sought for healing. In Hos 5.13 both Ephraim with his illness (חֲלִי) and Judah with his wounds (מַזְרוֹ) sent (וַיִּשְׁלַח) to the king of Assyria for help,

וְהוּא לֹא יוּכַל לְרַפֵּא לְכֶם וְלֹא יִגָּדֵה מִכֶּם מָזוֹר

‘...but he is not able to heal you nor shall a wound depart from you’ (Hos 5.13).

In Hosea 6.1-2 YHWH does not bring about death as in Deut 32.29, but he is responsible as the one who has ‘torn to pieces’ (טָרַף, Hos 6.1) but will heal, who has ‘struck’ (יָדָה) but will bind up and ‘make us alive’ (וַיַּחְיֵנוּ, 6.2). The healing of Naaman and the cursing of Gehazi exemplify the bringing of life and death by Elisha. We have already discussed a number of instances where he performs similar ‘YHWH-like’ acts whether healing (2.19-22), bringing about life (4.8-37), or death (2.23-25). Certainly he does not appear to act apart from YHWH; prophets are commonly viewed as YHWH’s representatives. However, in Elisha’s case does the identification with YHWH run deeper?

To answer this question it is important to examine the other side of the equation consisting in the ineffectiveness of the king of Israel. Jehoram’s brother Ahaziah sought Baal-zebub for healing (2 Kgs 1) and now the king of Aram seeks healing for his servant Naaman from Jehoram. The royal figures in each case (Ahaziah; Ben-hadad on behalf of Naaman) seek healing from an inappropriate source (Baal-zebub; Jehoram). However, this should not be taken as an indictment of Ben-Hadad; this foreign king’s actions may be painted in a more positive light. 2 Kgs 5 repeats a theme previously encountered in 2 Kgs 1 and repeated in 2 Kgs 8.7-15: foreign kings seek YHWH’s representative for healing while the kings of Israel are unable to recognise that help is close at hand.<sup>46</sup> In 2 Kgs 8.7-15 Ben-Hadad appears to have learned his lesson since he does not seek the king of Israel for healing but YHWH through his prophet.

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<sup>46</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 69. Hobbs notes the theme of the search for healing in a foreign country also present in 2 Kgs 1 and 8.

Instead it is Elisha who fulfils the healing role reserved for the king and takes his place as an apposite representative of YHWH. To a certain extent it is irrelevant whether healing was actually an aspect of the royal persona in Israel. It is apparent that at least the king of Aram supposed that it was; Naaman arrives bearing a letter requesting the king of Israel to cure him and the king of Israel's reaction shows that he understood the request as such.<sup>47</sup> If this is so then perhaps the king of Israel is being viewed as somewhat akin to the ineffective Baal-zebul of 2 Kings 1.

This role reversal at the human level reflects, at the divine level, a polemical concern common to the northern prophetic narratives: YHWH 'usurps from some other ancient Near Eastern deity his [the deity's] primary attribute' as exemplified for example in Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18)<sup>48</sup> S. Ackerman observes that the Baal in 1 Kgs 18 is frequently identified as Baal Haddu<sup>49</sup> noting that 'Yahweh strips from Ba'al Haddu his primary attribute, his ability to withhold or bring the rains.'<sup>50</sup> The behaviour of YHWH in 2 Kgs 5 is mimicked by his representative in the sense that as YHWH usurps the primary attribute of another deity in 1 Kgs 18, so the prophet Elisha usurps a supposed task of the royal figure (healing).

Admittedly Baal Haddu was not exalted as a god of skin diseases as is, for example, Sin the moon god of the Old Babylonian period.<sup>51</sup> This, however, may help us pursue the analogy a bit further. The idea of 'duelling deities', so clearly present

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<sup>47</sup> K. A. D. Smelik, 'De Betekenis van 2 Koningen 5. Een 'Amsterdamse' benadering,' *GTT* 88 (1988) 98-115 (105) asserts that the king of Aram does not fully comprehend the situation as evidenced by the fact that he thinks the king of Israel should heal Naaman and not Elisha ('De koning van Israël en niet de profeet dient volgens hem Naäman te genezen.'

<sup>48</sup> S. Ackerman, 'The Prayer of Nabonidus, Elijah on Mount Carmel, and the Development of Monotheism in Israel,' in W. G. Dever and J. E. Wright (eds.), *The Echoes of Many Texts: Reflections on Jewish and Christian Traditions: Essays in Honor of Lou H. Silberman* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 51-65 (61). In discussing 1 Kgs 18, Grottanelli 'Healers,' makes a distinction between *context*, a clash between the 'foreign' god Baal and the god YHWH, and *form*, a contest between prophets of Baal and the solitary Elijah ('Healers, 127).

<sup>49</sup> Ackerman, 'The Prayer,' 62.

<sup>50</sup> Ackerman, 'The Prayer,' 63.

<sup>51</sup> See Ackerman 'The Prayer,' 58-59 for evidence that Sin was viewed as a god of skin diseases.

in 1 Kgs 18, may not be far off from 2 Kgs 5 since Hadad was known as Rimmon (or Ramman) to the Arameans of Syria.<sup>52</sup> The argument here is not that Rimmon controlled skin diseases or that YHWH in 2 Kgs 5 has usurped those specific attributes of Rimmon. However, it is clear from chapter 1 that Baal was sought in the context of illness. The confrontation (YHWH verses the foreign god) already hinted at in Elisha's exchange with the king is further expanded by Naaman himself when in his nearly childish rage<sup>53</sup> he complains that the waters of his own land have cleansing abilities superior to those of the Jordan (5.11).

The story continues to portray the divine qualities of Elisha in Naaman's post-healing commentary (v.15). The healing of Naaman was to have the purpose of showing the military man that there was a prophet in Israel, but instead Naaman is led to even greater epistemological understanding. Recalling the little girl (נַעֲרָה קַטְנָה, v.2) who knew that there was a prophet in Samaria, Naaman's skin now like becomes like that of a little boy (נַעַר קָטָן, v.14). The external change in his flesh (וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּשָׂרוֹ, v.14b) reflects the inward change of his attitude such that he turned to the man of God (וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל-אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים, v.15a) with his exclamation:

הִנֵּה-נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי אִם-בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל  
'Behold! I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel!' (2 Kgs 5.15aβ)

Naaman, a foreign military man who in the past oppressed Israel and who was up to this point in the story a leper, now knowing the presence of both prophet and God in Israel, stands in sharp contrast to the unknowing and unnamed king of Israel.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> W. Maier III, 'Hadadrimmon,' *ABD* 3:13; J. C. Greenfield, 'The Aramean God Rammān/Rimmōn,' *IEJ* 26 (1976) 195-98.

<sup>53</sup> The portrayal of Naaman as a man out of control is clear from several features of 5.11-12. The verse begins by mentioning Naaman's wrath (וַיִּקְצֹף, cf. 3.27) when Elisha suggests that he merely wash in the Jordan to be healed. The narrative proceeds to paint a picture of a man whose unfulfilled hope of healing is unravelling before his very eyes. His perception of the prophet's certain presence (הִנֵּה אָמַרְתִּי אֵלַי יֵצֵא יְצוּא) is closely followed by a series of *weqatal* forms emphasising Naaman's presumption of what Elisha will do (וַעֲמַד וְקָרָא... וְהִנֵּיף) with its results (וְאִסְףָּ הַמַּצְרַע). The section ends as it began when, after his rhetorical question in verse 12, Naaman leaves in a rage (בְּהִקְדָּה).

<sup>54</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 18. Naaman was sent to Elisha to learn of the prophetic presence in Israel. In the end he learns that there is no God except in Israel, a fact with which the

Like the persistence of the sons of the prophets before him (cf. 2.17, וַיִּפְצְרוּ־בּוֹ), Naaman now presses upon Elisha (וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ, v.5.16) remuneration for his healing although the prophet flatly refuses to accept the gift.<sup>55</sup> Why does the prophet refuse this gratuity and what role does his denial play in the story? It is clear from other narratives that prophets were not averse to accepting goods for services rendered. Saul, for example, takes along silver as payment for the seer Samuel (1 Sam 9.7-8) and Jeroboam's wife takes bread, cakes and honey as payment to the prophet Ahijah (1 Kgs 14.3-4). Even Elisha does not refuse gifts on principle. There is no reason to believe, for example, that he refused the gifts brought from Ben-hadad by Hazael.<sup>56</sup>

### 2 Kings 5.20-27: A critique of kings

So why does Elisha refuse Naaman's gift? The answer to this question is integrally bound to Elisha's interrogation of Gehazi in 5.25-27. The contact between Elisha and Naaman ends with the prophet's לָךְ לְשָׁלוֹם (v.19a) but his accusations clothed in rhetorical garb, do not. Gehazi replies to Elisha's terse question, 'Where have you come from Gehazi?' (v.25aβ), with the statement, 'Your servant has not been anywhere in particular' (אֵינָהּ וְאֵינָהּ, v.25b). Elisha is well-informed of Gehazi's recent interaction with Naaman and yet nothing in the text necessitates any sort of supernatural prophetic vision here. Given Elisha's familiarity with Gehazi, it is not surprising that he understands Gehazi better than Gehazi presently realises.<sup>57</sup>

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narrative commences (5.1). J. Siebert-Hommes, 'The Widow of Zarephath,' 249 sees a contrast between Elijah who emphasises the God in Israel and Elisha who 'does his utmost to let it be known that there is a *prophet in Israel* (2 Kgs 5:8).' Because we agree with Smelik's assessment that the figures of prophet and YHWH coincide in this narrative ('Betekenis,' 106) there is no reason why the two concepts (prophet in Israel / God in Israel) must be viewed as adversaries.

<sup>55</sup> The verb פָּצַר and the gift בְּרִכָּה are also found in the exchange between Jacob and Esau at Gen 33.11.

<sup>56</sup> The examples here are found in O'Brien, "'Is this the Time...?'" 448 n.1.

<sup>57</sup> Some suggest that this is 'second sight' given by God (e.g., Robinson, *Kings*, 2:56). However, we agree with Fretheim's assessment that Elisha sees through the lie via 'God given insight into his servant, not extrasensory perception' (*First and Second Kings*, 154). Note how the Targum fills the gap: לִי בְרוּחַ נְבוּאָה אֶתְחַזֵּק לִי ('In a spirit of prophecy it was revealed to me'). See D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets. Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לֹא לִבִּי הָלַךְ כְּאִשֶּׁר הִפְדֵּי אִישׁ מֵעַל מְרֻכְבָּתוֹ לִקְרֹאתְךָ...

And he said to him, 'Did my thoughts not go along when a certain man turned back from upon his chariot to meet you?...' (2 Kgs 5.25a)

It will be argued that the final question from the prophet is not addressed to Gehazi alone. It is also an intrusive comment by the narrator which functions at a variety of levels within the story. Elisha queries:

...הֲעַתָּה לִקְחַת אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף וְלִקְחַת בְּנָדִים וְזֵיתִים וְכַרְמִים וְצֹאן וְבָקָר וְעֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת...

'Is it a time to take the silver and to take<sup>58</sup> clothes, and olive-groves and vineyards, and sheep and cattle, and menservants and maidservants?' (2 Kgs 5.25b)

This rather odd question is even more strange when we consider the lack of indications within the text that Gehazi took more than just silver and clothes.<sup>59</sup> Why does Elisha append the six items that follow?

Examining the pairs of items which Elisha lists may enable us to set forth at least one possible answer. The first two items on the list (silver and clothes) are simple enough in that they are the ones Gehazi himself asked for (v.22b), and received (v.23) from Naaman. Regarding olive-groves and vineyards, O'Brien rightly observes that together within the OT they function as a metonymy and signify 'a safe and prosperous life in the promised land.'<sup>60</sup> There are several passages in which the words are found in close proximity and which serve to represent the blessings of a land given by YHWH as part of spoils from war (Deut 6.11; Josh 24.13; Neh 9.25).<sup>61</sup>

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Aramaic Bible 10 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 274.

<sup>58</sup> The importance of the motif of gifts and the verbs נתן (vv. 1, 17, 22, 23) and especially לקח [vv.5, 15, 16 (2x), 20 (2x), 23, 24, 26 (2x)] are noted by Smelik, 'Betekenis,' 113. In the case of the former verb we may note its importance in the immediately preceding tale (4.42, 43, 44) as well.

<sup>59</sup> In the LXX Gehazi uses the silver to purchase (ἀλήμψη ἐν ἀβύσσῳ) Elisha's list of items (Burney, *Notes*, 283-84). See also the similar treatment by the Targum.

<sup>60</sup> O'Brien, "'Is this the Time...?'" 455-56. O'Brien's claim that these words are 'often together' is accurate although perhaps not stated as judiciously as it might have been given the number of times they are found apart. The exact phrase זֵיתִים וְכַרְמִים is found only at 2 Kgs 5.26. More typically כרם is found first followed (of course not necessarily immediately) by זית. It is found in the Pentateuch (Exod 23.11; Deut 6.11), Former Prophets (Josh 24.13; Judg 15.5; 1 Sam 8.14; 2 Kgs 5.26; 2 Kgs 18.32), Latter Prophets (Amos 4.9), and Writings (Neh 5.11; 9.25). Thanks to D. Reimer for also pointing out Hab 3.17 with its slight semantic shift.

<sup>61</sup> Several other passages use כרם and זית in similar fashion but with a different emphasis. In 2 Kgs 18.31-32 the king of Assyria promises Deuteronomy-like blessings if Judah submits to him. In Amos

The next phrase **צֵאן וּבְקָר**, should be viewed as ‘synecdoche representing wealth in terms of agricultural produce but particularly as blessing through the covenant with Abraham.’<sup>62</sup> While the use of the phrase in terms of agricultural wealth or possessions is predominant,<sup>63</sup> it is only at Gen 24.35 that YHWH’s blessing of Abraham is made explicit in the context of wealth. It may be argued that the gifts Abraham receives (Gen 12.16; 20.14) are merely evidence of his becoming a great nation (Gen 12.2), but this is making explicit what the text merely implies.<sup>64</sup> In other instances the phrase is used as part of a treaty creation (Gen 21.27), plunder,<sup>65</sup> sacrifice and/or sacrificial meal.<sup>66</sup>

The final phrase, **עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת**, approximately nineteen times in the OT<sup>67</sup> and is associated most often with gifts (Gen 12.16; 20.14), YHWH’s blessing of Abraham (Gen 24.35), or making / being made slaves (Deut 28.68; Isa 14.2; Jer 34.11, 16; Esth 7.4; 2 Chr 28.10). O’Brien comments: ‘Thus, menservants and maidservants were normally acquired as the plunder of victorious battles or were obtained outside Israel either through purchases or as gifts.’<sup>68</sup> Given the fact that each pair evidences an

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4.9, the gifts of the land once given by YHWH are destroyed; vineyards by blight (**וְשִׁפְחוֹת**) and withering (**וְעֲבָדִים**), and olive trees by locusts.

<sup>62</sup> O’Brien, “‘Is this the Time...?’” 456. O’Brien’s claim that ‘sheep and cattle occur 77 times in the OT’ likely represents passages where the two words are found in close proximity. The syntagm **צֵאן וּבְקָר** occurs 42 times and another 21 times in the reverse order (A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament Using the Hebrew and Aramaic Text* with an Introduction by J. H. Sailhamer, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 971, col.1). The latter order is found especially in Deuteronomy in the context of sacrifice and eating. In the citations that follow in the footnotes I have set in bold print those verses in which **צֵאן** follows **בְקָר**. The passages cited below do not comprise an exhaustive list.

<sup>63</sup> Gen 32.8; 33.13; 45.10; 46.32; 47.1; 50.8; Ex **9.3**; 10.9, 24; 12.32, 38; 34.3; 2 Sam 12.2, 4.

<sup>64</sup> I do not want to slight such an interpretative methodology provided the interpreter recognises his or her *modus operandi*. Of course much of the present study is itself based on making explicit what is textually covert. Genesis also contains examples of YHWH’S blessing upon Isaac (Gen 26.12-14) and upon Jacob (Gen 30.43; 48.3). Other uses of ‘sheep and cattle’ in the context of YHWH’S blessing are found in Deut **8.13**; 2 Chr 32.29.

<sup>65</sup> Gen 34.28; 1 Sam 14.32 ; 15.9, 15, 21; 27.9; 30.20

<sup>66</sup> Ex 20.24; Lev **1.2**; **27.32**; Num 11.22; **22.40**; **31.28**; Deut **12.6**, **17**, **21**; **14.23**, **26**; **15.9**; 16.2; 1 Kgs 1.9; 8.5; 2 Chr 5.6; 18.2

<sup>67</sup> Even-Shoshan, 1198, col. 3.

<sup>68</sup> O’Brien, “‘Is this the Time...?’” 456. In several of these instances (Jer 34.11, 16; 2 Chr 28.10) it is Hebrews enslaving fellow Hebrews *contra* Lev 25.39. The phrase occurs in the reverse order at Gen 30.43.

association with plunder, perhaps Elisha is saying that it is not now time to plunder the Arameans, but that there will come a time when it is appropriate. In this way the 'release' of Naaman portends the release of the Arameans in the next story in which we find them (6.8-23).<sup>69</sup> This is certainly a possible explanation for the appended items, but we would like to suggest another.

The narrative function of Elisha's rhetorical question may be approached from two distinct but somewhat related directions which comport well with our interpretation of the passage thus far. We may perceive Elisha's question as a condemnation of Gehazi. Earlier we argued for the role reversal of prophet and king; in the curse placed upon Gehazi, role reversal is again prominent as the former follower of Elisha is burdened with Naaman's leprosy 'forever' and Naaman is given some of Israel's land.<sup>70</sup>

The rhetorical question, while directed to Gehazi, may also be read as an intrusive comment by the narrator which spotlights several wider narrative concerns. If the overall interpretation of the narratives to this point is plausible, and the narrator has previously rolled Judah and Israel in the same narrative blanket, then perhaps Elisha's rhetorical question provides further evidence for the condemnation of kings, both northern and southern. There is no indication that Gehazi ever took any of the other items on the formulaic list<sup>71</sup> and yet when we raise our eyes to the wider scope of Kings we remember that it was Ahab's seizure of a vineyard that brought about YHWH's greatest displeasure.

The taking of Naboth's vineyard was the chief event that led to YHWH's oracle of destruction (1 Kgs 21.21-22) against Ahab's house, a prophecy that awaits fulfilment

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<sup>69</sup> A similar point is made by Moore, *God Saves*, 83.

<sup>70</sup> On this latter point see O'Brien, "'Is this the Time...?'" 457. Smelik, 'Betekenis,' 113-14 argues that the author has a propensity to such role reversals and contrasts within the story. Among the numerous examples mentioned are: YHWH v. Rimmon; Israel's king and God v. Israel's king and prophet; Elisha's message v. Naaman's expectations; Jordan river v. rivers of Damascus; comprehending servants v. uncomprehending masters; 'great man' v. 'little boy.'

<sup>71</sup> See below for a justification of the term 'formulaic.'

within the story. This begs the further question of whether there is any other passage in the OT which combines a list of items similar to 2 Kgs 5.26b and anti-kingly sentiment? A passage that immediately comes to mind is found in 1 Sam 8.10-22 where Samuel warns Israel of the dangers inherent in their request for a king.

He will take...(v. 13a)	... יקח
...and the best of your vineyards and olive groves	...וְאֶת־כֶּרְמֵיכֶם וְיֵיתֵיכֶם הַטּוֹבִים
he will take and give to his servants. (v. 14)	יִקַּח וְנָתַן לְעַבְדָּיו
....	....
And your menservants	וְאֶת־עַבְדֵיכֶם
And your maidservants	וְאֶת־שִׁפְחוֹתֵיכֶם
and the best of your choice young men	וְאֶת־בְּחֹרֵיכֶם הַטּוֹבִים
and your asses	וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיכֶם
He will take and make them do his work. (v. 16)	יִקַּח וְעָשָׂה לְמִלְאָכָתוֹ
A tenth of your flocks and you yourselves shall	צֹאנֵיכֶם וְעֶשְׂרֵי וְאֶתֶם תְּהִי־לּוֹ לְעַבְדִּים
become his servants (v. 17)	

Cohn comments that this list includes ‘the possessions which a despotic king can be expected to take from the people.’<sup>72</sup> Clearly the 1 Samuel passage cited above sets forth only a small portion of the total anti-monarchical sentiment observed in the longer segment encompassing 1 Sam 8.10-22, and yet vv.14-17 contain five of the six items listed by Elisha and in fact all six if we accept the more likely LXX rendering τὰ βουκόλια ὑμῶν (בקרִיכם) in the place of the MT’s בחוריכם.<sup>73</sup> The rhetorical question, in the perspective of a wider narrative context, raises the possibility of a condemnation of kingship. The prophet clearly disapproves of the taking of such items, as he had strongly rejected Naaman’s earlier plea to accept a gift. Instead, Elisha gives rather than takes, reflecting a YHWH-like dispersion of the deuteronomic blessings of the land which Israel should have obtained. It is to this latter point that we now briefly turn.

<sup>72</sup> Cohn, ‘Form and Perspective,’ 182; O’Brien, “‘Is this the Time...?’” 456 agrees with Cohn’s assessment that the list represents a ‘tithing list for a despotic ruler from the blessings of the land’ but does not agree that the parallel portrays Gehazi acting like a despotic ruler. Cohn merely states, however, that Gehazi’s actions are associated ‘with the worse excesses of royal corruption’ (p.182).

<sup>73</sup> S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 53. D. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 48-49.

Frequently in treatments of the Elisha narratives, stories are dealt with in isolation. This limits the interpreter's ability to gain any sense of interrelationship between stories. Cohn for example, in analyzing chapter five as an independent story, claims that its length and complexity separates it from the shorter tales that immediately precede (4.38-41, 42-44) and follow (6.1-7).<sup>74</sup> I am not arguing that such an analysis is without merit but merely attempting to observe narrative features and connections that will help us to discern coherent features of Elisha and the stories in which he is found.

O'Brien argues that Elisha's rhetorical question, 'Is this the time to receive YHWH's blessing?', clearly requires a negative response. In his opinion the rhetorical question highlights to both Gehazi and the exilic reader that the conversion of this Gentile is not illustrative of YHWH's favour upon Israel but instead his displeasure. Naaman's conversion to Yahwism 'is intended as a deliberate foil to the general faithlessness of the Israelites and their kings in that age.'<sup>75</sup> Keeping only chapter 5 before one's eyes such a conclusion is possible; on the other hand, observation of the wider narrative horizon actually reveals the receiving of items that bring to mind the deuteronomic blessings.

Both Cohn and O'Brien sense something of a 'critique of kings' in 2 Kgs 5. The present interpretation goes slightly further in claiming that this critique, revealed more openly within chapter five, is implicit in the continual promise of blessing to the remnant which we have observed at various points in Elisha's concern for the people. This provides for a more wide-ranging function to the shorter stories. The answer to Elisha's rhetorical question may in fact be 'No, now is not the time...', but it is an answer begging refinement; and that refinement exists in the form of a variety of stories in which Elisha, contrary to the tendencies of despotic kings, gives

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<sup>74</sup> Cohn, 'Form and Perspective,' 171.

<sup>75</sup> O'Brien, 'Is this the Time...?', 457.

deuteronomic blessings to 'faithful Israel', namely to those who have not bowed to Baal (1 Kgs 19.18). In this regard Elisha's rhetorical question is an indictment of faithlessness in Israel but not without qualification: YHWH earlier promised the preservation of a remnant and it is to this remnant that the blessings of the land will come. This requires further elaboration.

Perhaps the most unique and unexamined feature of the Elisha narratives concerns the prophet's consistent provision of the basic staples of life. This is true particularly, although not exclusively, for the shorter stories, the so-called prophetic legends. The reigning conception is that these narratives were preserved merely as a way to emphasise the miraculous and thereby exalt the holy man of God. Rofé asserts: 'Elisha's miracles are minor deliverances, small acts of salvation, in both scope and effect. They attest merely to the supernatural power of the Man of God who performs them.'<sup>76</sup> However, given that Elisha's appended list represents 'the blessings of the land, including security and prosperity, as a significant component of Yahweh's covenant with Israel'<sup>77</sup> we here argue that the placement of these stories within Kings provides an implicit critique of kingship on the one hand, while leaving open the possibility of hope entailed in the blessing of the land on the other. Below are listed the narratives in 2 Kings 2-8 comprising ideas of abundance along with those that reflect some of the concerns observed in Deuteronomy 6-8:

- 1) 2 Kgs 2: WATER and LAND healed (לאִי־יִהְיֶה מָשֶׁם עוֹד מִנַּת וּמִשְׁקֶלֶת), v.2.21b)
- 2) 2 Kgs 3: Abundance of WATER (וְהַנַּחֲלָה הָיָה יִמְלֵא מַיִם), 3.17a); (וְהַמֶּלֶךְ הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַמַּיִם), 3.20b)
- 3) 2 Kgs 4-8: The LOSS OF IDENTITY
- 4) 2 Kgs 4.1-7: Abundance of OIL (הֵם מְנַשִּׂים אֵלֶיהָ וְהִיא מֵיִצְקָתָהּ), 4.5b)
- 5) 2 Kgs 4.8-37: The promise of CHILDREN
- 6) 2 Kgs 4: Abundance of BREAD (וַיִּתֵּן לְפָנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּזְתְּרוּ כְּדַבַּר יְהוָה), 4.44)

<sup>76</sup> Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 15. He also claims that they play no part in the history of the nation, they have no religious significance and they are not tests of God's strength (pp.14-15).

<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, "Is this the Time...?" 456.

- 7) 2 Kgs 5: Warnings against misappropriation of the BLESSINGS OF THE LAND (2 Kgs 5.26b)
- 8) 2 Kgs 6.1-7: BORROWED IRON and the need for expanded DWELLINGS
- 9) 2 Kgs 6.24-7.20: Abundance of FLOUR and BARLEY (אֲרֻבוֹת בִּשְׁמִים, 7.2a); PLUNDERING the foreigner
- 10) 2 Kgs 8.1-6: The restoration of LAND

The stories of 2 Kings are believed to have little in common with deuteronomic themes, but is this true? Deuteronomy 7-8 is generally concerned with the destruction of the gods of the nations followed by the promise of abundance of the land, features likewise present in the northern prophetic narratives where Elijah's confrontation with Baal worship is followed by Elisha's provision of life-giving produce. The concept of abundance in the land is especially prevalent in Deut 8.6-9 which holds out the promise of good land (cf. 2 Kgs 2.19-22) and an abundance of basic provisions: water (cf. 2 Kgs 3), grains (cf. 2. Kgs 6.24-7.20); bread (cf. 2 Kgs 4.42-44); oil (cf. 2 Kgs 4.1-7); and iron (cf. 6.1-7)<sup>78</sup>. Other possible relations between the two passages include the assurance of fertility (Deut 7.14; cf. 2 Kgs 4.8-37), wiping out the names of foreign kings (Deut 7.24; cf. loss of the name of the king of Israel, 2 Kgs 4-8), plundering the land (Deut 6.10-12; cf. 7.15-16), and the expansion of housing due to multiplication of YHWH's blessing (Deut 8.12-13; cf. 2 Kgs 6.1-7).

The idea of eschatological blessing (abundance) in the Elisha tales was argued for by W. Reiser more than forty years ago.<sup>79</sup> The arguments have been re-examined and

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<sup>78</sup> In observing these connections the reader may think that I have gone well beyond likely textual influences. At the risk of further offence it is interesting that conquest of the land holds out the promise of pomegranates רְמֹן (Deut 8.8) also the name of the god renounced by Naaman in his promise to worship YHWH alone.

<sup>79</sup> W. Reiser, 'Eschatologische Gottessprüche in den Elisa-Legenden,' *TZ* 9 (1953) 321-38. Reiser examines the promises of food and water introduced by a messenger formula in 1 Kgs 17.14a, 2 Kgs 2.21; 3.16-17; 4.43; 7.1. He concludes that 'the oracles point modestly, but resolutely to a time which will transcend the present everyday life. They promise a time of salvation. The oracles are eschatological oracles' (p.333). The conclusion is cited by W. Thiel, 'Character and Function of Divine Sayings in the Elijah and Elisha Traditions,' in H. G. Reventlow (ed.), *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, JSOTSup 243 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 189-199 (198).

overturned recently by W. Thiel.<sup>80</sup> Texts such as Amos 9.13, Hos 2.23-25 and 14.6-9 are mentioned by Reiser for comparison with the Elisha traditions but are dismissed by Thiel because of ‘the immense distance in the content of the promises.’<sup>81</sup> Thiel is arguing that the minuscule promises of the Elisha stories pale in the bright light of the passages from the minor prophets. However, if the overall narrative context is kept in mind, (the destruction of Ahab’s line and Baal worship; war with Aram; miracles and the loss of identity), there is ample evidence that ‘salvation’, however conceived, is an important concern of the stories.<sup>82</sup> As opposed to the more mature reflections in the latter prophets – ideas flourishing in response to imminent national crises of greater proportion – one might expect in the Elisha stories a nascent eschatological conception cultured in the milieu of kings who have rejected YHWH in favour of the Baals.<sup>83</sup> Of course, it is by no means certain that the Elisha stories arose in a period chronologically earlier than the passages in Amos and Hosea. In any case one would expect the poetic expression of such blessings to exceed that found in prose. There are clearly ‘immense differences’ between the prose blessings 2 Kgs 2-8 and the poetry of Amos and Hosea. However, these are no more dramatic than the prose expressions of Exodus 14 and Judges 4 and their poetic counterparts found in Exodus 15/Ps 77.10-20 and Judges 5.

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<sup>80</sup> Thiel, ‘Character,’ 189-199. He wishes to re-examine Reiser’s results for several reasons. First, the original article ‘has not had as much attention as it deserves,’ and second, ‘if these results were correct, we would obtain important insights into the origins and development of the Elisha traditions. We would also have the opportunity to observe something like an eschatology of salvation that already existed in the prophetic circles of the late ninth century BCE’ (p.189). Thiel concludes only 1 Kgs 17.14a points to ‘a fairy-tale like fullness’. For the other stories, ‘Probably not more is meant than that the consumption for the day is secured, and this only for a while’ (p.198).

<sup>81</sup> Thiel, ‘Character,’ 198.

<sup>82</sup> Grottanelli, ‘Healers and Saviours,’ in Bianchi and Vermaseren, 649, notes that ‘salvation’ in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies typically involved safety from famine, epidemics and defeat in war. It also covered becoming a slave which ‘often ensued as a consequence of the main three’.

<sup>83</sup> G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 2:29 appears to concur. He claims that Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah developed ideas ‘in such a way as to make Elijah’s and Elisha’s view of the future seem naïve and almost embryonic.’ In citing Reiser’s article von Rad notes that speaking of eschatology here comes down to how one defines the term (29 n.48).

## Conclusion

We have argued that 2 Kings chapters 4 and 5, following upon the blending of kings and kingdoms in 2 Kgs 3, manifests an implicit critique of kingship and an elevation of the prophet while recalling the deuteronomic blessings exhibited in surrounding stories, particularly the so-called prophetic legends. These blessings arise from a prophet who, in reversing roles with the king, takes on characteristics both royal and divine in his acts of healing and provision of the basic staples of water, oil, bread and grains.<sup>84</sup> The oracle concerning Ahab in 1 Kgs 20.42 ('your life instead of his life, your people instead of his people') is manifested in another dramatic role reversal in 2 Kgs 5 in which the Israelite Gehazi is laden with the gentile Naaman's leprosy, while Naaman takes the very land of Israel home with him. Perhaps the critique of kingship and the concern with deuteronomic blessing would be of concern to a writer or editor in an exilic setting in which the loss of kingship and the question of YHWH's continued concern for his people were pre-eminent. From the standpoint of the context in which the stories are set Grottanelli notes:

But yahwistic healers are not only more powerful than the prophets of Baal; they also detain more charismatic power than the king of Israel....

Of course Elisha succeeds where the king has failed because he is the prophet of Yahweh, and it is the god who operates through him, as is clear from his words to Na<sup>ʿ</sup>aman. However, it is significant that we have here an explicit statement that *the king cannot heal* because he is not the god (*ha'elohim*), that the statement is proffered by the king, and that the prophet heals the man the king was unable to heal. Elsewhere (II Kings 1) the king of Israel is sick, seeks 'salvation' in a 'foreign' cult, and is predicted to die by Elijah, who thus appears as an antihealer.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The 'saving' nature of Near Eastern kingship is some matter of debate. According to Grottanelli, M. Liverani suggests that the saving nature of kingship in Mesopotamia and Syria was linked with royal justice manifested primarily in the 'remission of debts, and freeing of debtors' (Grottanelli, 'Healers' in Bianchi and Vermaseren, 649-50). If this is so, 2 Kgs 4.1-7 may be another example of a royal trait exhibited by the prophet. The article to which Grottanelli refers is M. Liverani, *La Royauté syrienne de l'Age du Bronze Récent: AA. VV., Le Palais et la Royauté (Archéologie et Civilization)*, Actes de la XIX Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Paris 1971, 329-356.

<sup>85</sup> Grottanelli, 'Healers,' 130. See also Overholt, *Cultural Anthropology*, 36-39 who suggests that Elijah and Elisha act like shamans (pp.37, 45). Overholt also claims it is possible to 'generalize' about

Although he does not make the connection explicitly, Grottanelli sees the king's statement in 2 Kgs 5 as 'significant' because he connects the rise of the prophetic movement with 'the total collapse of the whole social and political system of the Eastern Mediterranean' associated with the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age.<sup>86</sup> If, as Grottanelli argues, Israel's first king Saul is a transitional figure portrayed as a 'possessed prophet,' then perhaps it is appropriate for us to see Elisha, (the last northern prophet in the book Kings prior to that kingdom's collapse) as a royal prophet.<sup>87</sup> This proposal becomes even more interesting as we turn to the 2 Kgs 6.1-23 where Elisha returns 'borrowed iron' (a symbol of failed kingship?) to the surface and single-handedly 'saves' Israel from the Arameans.

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the 'social' function of such stories: 'They serve to legitimate and enhance the authority of persons about whom they are told' (p.40).

<sup>86</sup> Grottanelli, 'Healers,' 128.

<sup>87</sup> Grottanelli, 'Charismatic Possession and Monarchic Rationalization,' in *Kings and Prophets*, 87-109 sees Saul as a transitional figure between the judges and kings (p. 100) and elsewhere notes that Saul is portrayed as a 'possessed "prophet"' ('Healers,' 128).

## CHAPTER 6

### LAND CLEARING AND CHARIOT FEARING (2 KINGS 6.1-23)

#### Introduction

Ursine assaults on young children aside, the story of the lost and retrieved axe-head in 2 Kings 6.1-7, must rank among the most bizarre (and some would say most trivial) of the Elisha narratives, and one that provides perhaps the greatest challenge to the exploration of literary coherence. What in the world does one make of such a story? Is it of any consequence that it is placed here and not elsewhere? Why, for instance, is it not grouped with similar stories of like quality in chapter 4?<sup>1</sup> At this point we have to admit that the deposit of the narrative in its present locale appears to bear little relationship to Naaman's healing that precedes it.

Likewise the stories which follow (2 Kgs 6.8-7.20) provide a number of interpretative difficulties. Besides the questionable relation to the axe-head story, there is the status of the relationship between Aram and Israel. For example, the king of Aram, once willing to send his commander Naaman to Israel for healing (5.5-6), is portrayed in 6.8-7.20 as a king whose war with Israel is ongoing. Likewise, the relationship between Elisha and the king of Israel in this section is at odds with other portions: the prophet who could at one stage, barely tolerate the presence of the Israelite king (3.14), now appears to be on reasonably friendly terms, warning the king of the impending Aramean threat (6.9-10). The relationship is later given a negative emphasis (6.31-32) where it would provide no small pleasure for the king to remove Elisha's head from his shoulders. Likewise, the portrait of the prophet's knowledge is at odds with other stories. At one point Elisha has no explanation for the Shunammite's bitter distress (4.27) yet within 6.8-7.20 he seems to see all and know all (6.12, 16, 32; 7.1-2, 17).

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 2:421 states that the story belonged to the same collection as the 'wonder narratives' of 4.1-44 and 8.1-6. He notes that 'since they both belong to the same locality,' it is likely that 6.1-7 originally followed 4.38-41 and that each has its origins in Gilgal.

With respect to 2 Kgs 6.1-7, it would be simple enough to follow reigning interpretations of the story and either ignore it or treat it in isolation and conclude that in this tale one may observe another example of a prophetic legend seeking the exaltation of a holy man of God. Moore, for example, decides to ignore 6.1-7 as a brief 'interruption'.<sup>2</sup> Nelson holds that the story 'does nothing more than emphasise the power of the prophet.'<sup>3</sup> Nelson may be correct. However, if this view of the narrative is less than satisfying (exactly how many stories do we need to emphasise the power of the prophet?), we may annex one of several other options available to us by arguing that the story makes a general point about prophecy, stresses the importance of listening to the man of God, or displays the way in which God cares for the little people through his prophet. Any or all of these may be correct and our acceptance of one, some, or all would contribute little to advancing an understanding of the passage within the wider borders of the Elisha narratives and the question of literary coherence.

Recently some scholars have attempted to move the interpretation of this baffling passage in other directions and to make sense of the tale in its present position. Satterthwaite, for example, urges that closer attention be paid to context. We are made immediately aware that there is some growth in numbers among the sons of the prophets as they inform Elisha that their present dwelling is getting too small (צַר, 6.1b). Gaining Elisha's permission to go and the promise that he will accompany them, the prophetic band with prophet in tow heads off to the Jordan to split (וַיִּקְרְבוּ, v.4) trees in order to build a suitable dwelling (vv.2-4).<sup>4</sup> The fact that this building project is taking place near the Jordan, according to Satterthwaite, recalls the conquest under Joshua: '[T]he restoration of the axe-head implies not simply

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<sup>2</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 70.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 185.

<sup>4</sup> The verb is used elsewhere in Kings of Solomon's threat to 'divide' the child of the prostitutes (1 Kgs 3.25, 26), a story soon given a new twist in 2 Kgs 6.24-31.

YHWH's concern about the possible embarrassment of one of his faithful, but an endorsement of the symbolic repossession'.<sup>5</sup>

Satterthwaite also argues that the iron is a symbolic representation of Naaman and the Aramean army. In this view 6.1-7 points backward and forward. With respect to chapter 5, Naaman represents a kind of 'axe-head' which the king of Aram has lost, but which is eventually restored by obedience to the prophetic command as Naaman, like the iron, is immersed in the Jordan and returned to its owner.<sup>6</sup> In looking ahead, the iron foreshadows the entire Aramean army which, in its attempt to seize Elisha, is 'blinded', captured, and eventually restored to the Aramean king.<sup>7</sup> Another possibility is that the axe-head parallels YHWH's power (the chariots and horses of fire) which is again made available to Israel.<sup>8</sup>

The present investigation will adopt a multi-perspectival approach for the two stories of 2 Kgs 6.1-23. In examining 6.1-7, several other passages within the Elisha cycle will be explored. Next, possible lexical or narrative relationships between the two disparate stories will be sought. After a close look at the remainder of the second story, the horizon will broaden again to the Moses/Joshua traditions. In some respects the present chapter mimics Elisha's actions in 2 Kgs 6.1-7 – primarily it is an attempt to return a peripheral story from the stream bed to the narrative surface.

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<sup>5</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 18 refers to repossession of the land.

<sup>6</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 19. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 70 do not go quite this far but do claim that the axe-head story follows Naaman because of their common link to the Jordan. Rofé claims that the position of the Naaman story is 'problematic', however, he also notes the common element of the Jordan (*Prophetic Stories*, 50).

<sup>7</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 19.

<sup>8</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 19 n.52. Along similar lines Brichto, *Grammar*, 199-200 argues that the story does not relate a 'literal event' but is metaphoric. The axe-head is a symbol of power. He points to Isa 10.15 (גִּרְזֵן) where the king of Assyria is likened to an autonomous axe. Like a horse that knows it bears an inexperienced rider the axe throws itself from the handle. Elisha, who is the true wielder of power, reshapes a new axe handle and casts it into the water. In this view the story is a lesson for the novice prophetic disciple.

## Elisha: a Prophet of Restoration

Before turning to a more detailed examination of 6.1-23, we will explore several narratives similar to 6.1-7. There are a number of stories in which Elisha is confronted with a problem that is resolved by the activity of ‘throwing’ or ‘casting’ (שָׁלַךְ). The first hint at this predilection to toss things is located in 2 Kgs 2.21a when Elisha throws salt (וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ-שָׂם מֶלַח) into the waters. The second instance is found in 4.41a when the prophet casts flour into the pot (וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ אֶל-הַסִּיר). The final instance occurs in 6.6b after one of the prophetic company loses his borrowed iron implement. Elisha cuts off a stick (וַיִּקְצֹב-עֵץ) and casts it into the Jordan whereupon the iron floats (וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ-שָׂמָּה וַיִּצָּף הַבַּרְזֶל).<sup>9</sup> In each of these stories the prophet’s activity results in restoration. As was argued previously, death is removed and life is restored to the waters of 2.19-22 and the stew of 4.38-41. In 6.1-7 the iron tool is restored to the prophet’s follower. The servant obeys Elisha’s command to lift up the iron for himself (וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחֵהוּ, v.7b). Why does Elisha tell the disciple to pick it up himself? Surely a prophet who can make iron float can also raise it out of the water, even miraculously, and set it at his servant’s feet. The importance of this feature will be explored in due course.

There are several other occurrences of שָׁלַךְ in 2 Kings important for the present discussion (13.21; 17.20). In the first an unnamed party is startled by Moabite raiders while burying a man (13.21).<sup>10</sup> Unlike Elijah whom YHWH may have cast upon some mountain or valley (2.16), Elisha is here the one being cast upon. Thus the prophet is not the ‘direct object’ of the verb but rather its ‘indirect object’. In hasty response to the approaching Moabites, the party throws (וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ, v.21a) the man into Elisha’s

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<sup>9</sup> The word ‘axe-head’ often used in translation is a reasonable guess for the Hebrew בַּרְזֶל. See Deut 19.5.

<sup>10</sup> In 13.21 the first action is durative (‘while they were burying’) suggested by the participle while the second action is instantaneous as suggested by the *qatal* form (‘they saw’). The construction is found also at 2.23; 6.5, 26. See J-M §166f(3).

tomb and when his body touches the prophet's bones, life is restored to him (וַיַּחַי וַיִּקָּם עַל-רַגְלָיו, v.21b).

Following immediately upon this story is the reminder of Hazeal's ongoing oppression of Israel and YHWH's continued favour and compassion revealed because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was not willing to destroy Israel nor to cast them (הַשְּׁלִיכֵם, v.13.23b) from his presence. The theological weight afforded this term in chapter 13 is further supported by the important change in YHWH's actions observed in 2 Kgs 17.19-20 where the merging identities of Israel and Judah – hinted at within the Elisha narratives – are more explicitly intertwined: Judah had not kept YHWH's commandments but had instead walked in the ways of Israel (v.19). Ultimately YHWH rejects 'all the seed of Israel', exposing them to 'plunderers' (שָׁסִים) until he had cast them (הַשְּׁלִיכֵם, v.20) from his presence. We will have occasion to revisit the plunderers in our concluding chapter. For now it is important to notice that the prophet, although dead, counters the negative elements of their presence.<sup>11</sup>

The point is not that the verb שָׁלַךְ has some restricted lexical tie to idea of restoration, but merely the observation that its occurrence within the Elisha narratives coincides with 'restoration' as an important thematic element within these several short vignettes. The connection of 'casting' and 'restoration' in the Elisha narratives is countered by several instances which bring together the presence of plunderers and YHWH's actions. In 13.23 he is unwilling to cast Israel from his presence due to his covenant while in 17.20, Israel is removed from his presence.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Our interpretation runs counter to that of Zakovitch, "Tell Your Son...", 78-79. He claims that the story of Elisha's burial is 'highly exceptional', that the story treats Elisha 'quite cruelly' and 'belittles the image of the prophet' since there is no grief, no mourning, a mundane burial, and no role for God. It is not even the prophet who is resurrected but an anonymous person ("Tell Your Son...", 78-79).

<sup>12</sup> The verb (שָׁלַךְ) is also found within the Elisha narratives at 3.25 (Israelite army throwing stones onto Moabite fields); 7.15 (Arameans throwing supplies as they flee); 9.25, 26 (Jehu's order to cast Jehoram onto the field that belonged to Naboth); 10.26 (casting out the slain bodies of the ministers of Baal).

Of course, the restoration theme is evident in other places within the Elisha stories where the verb does not occur. Indeed the greater portion of the Elisha narratives exhibit restoration as a feature (3.15-17; 4-8.6). It is undeniable that 6.1-7 seeks to elevate the man of God but, in tandem with like-minded stories, it does so in order to emphasise the role of Elisha in the restoration of **שְׁלוֹם**, one who brings order to chaos. S. Olyan states with respect to his study of 2 Kgs 9: ‘Both the prophets and Jehu are instruments of Yahweh’s restoration of *šālôm*.’<sup>13</sup> However, Elisha is the restorer of **שְׁלוֹם** *par excellence*. This is evidenced in the story that follows in which the enemies of Israel are, at the prophetic command, shown mercy and where a circumstance, possibly ending in the complete destruction of the enemy, concludes in peace. It is likewise true in the preceding story where Naaman’s plea for mercy is met with the prophetic **לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם** (5.19).

#### *Narrowing the Focus: The Intruding Narrator, Terminology, and Analogy*

Several questions arise from the initial exploration of 2 Kgs 6.1-7. Why does the usually insightful Elisha need to be shown where the axe-head fell? Are there any lexical connections between this story and the one that follows? If so, does the terminology of the first story prepare the reader for the terminology of the second? Do any actions of the first story foreshadow actions of the second? The portrayal of Elisha in 2 Kgs 6.1-7 as a prophet of restoration is only one of several ways to look at the story. A close examination may provide answers to these questions.

As with earlier stories, 2 Kgs 6.8-23 commences with the nominal clause establishing its background and subject.<sup>14</sup> The story itself consists of four relatively

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<sup>13</sup> Here one need only to point out the vital importance of **שְׁלוֹם** in 2 Kgs 9. See S. Olyan, ‘*Hāšālôm*’ Some Literary Considerations of 2 Kings 9,’ *CBQ* 46 (1984) 652-68. Olyan claims that in order to understand 2 Kgs 9 we must recognise the underlying contrast between completeness (order) or ‘things being right’ and incompleteness (disorder) or ‘things in need of correction, the restoration of *šālôm*’. The state of **שְׁלוֹם** does not exist in the community because Ahab has murdered Naboth and Jezebel still has influence (pp. 661-62). See also D. J. Wiseman, “Is it Peace?” *Covenant and Diplomacy*, *VT* 32 (1982) 311-26.

<sup>14</sup> Once more the new pericope commences by establishing the background of what will follow.

equal parts (vv.8-10; 11-14; 15-19; 20-23). The narrator's presence is noted in the opening section as evidenced by the phrase אֶל-מְקוֹם פְּלִנִי אֶל-מְנִי ('to such and such a place,' v.8).<sup>15</sup> In view of the importance of the information it is unlikely that such an abstract statement would occur in an interchange between a king and his advisors. Where information is unimportant it is not uncommon to use generic terms in narrative or speech.<sup>16</sup> It does little good for a king to tell his generals to attack (תַּחְנִנִי, v.8b)<sup>17</sup> 'at such and such a place.' Neither would the prophet be of any genuine military assistance by telling a king to be on guard at הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה (v.9). If the actual place had been forgotten – assuming its existence in the first place – the name could have been fabricated, although with biblical narrative this seems less likely than in, for example, an informal account. If a narrator knows enough to report conversations

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The king of Aram is continuously waging war (הָיָה נֹלָחֵם, 6.8) with Israel. See J-M §154m for a discussion of הָיָה plus the participle, where the latter expresses the 'durative aspect'. B. Long, argues that the phrase highlights the 'frequentative action' (2 Kings, 85).

<sup>15</sup> BDB:811, s.v. פֶּלֶן.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the way in which we might refer in a conversation to 'Mr. So-and-So,' or 'What's his name?' See Berlin, *Poetics*, 153 n.8. Along with 2 Kgs 6.8-10, Berlin discusses the other occurrences (1 Sam 21.3; Ruth 4.1) on pages 99-101.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed argumentation for reading תַּחְנִנִי and נִחְרִים from the root נָחַח ('to descend) is found in P. Joüon, 'Notes de critique textuelle,' *MUSJ* 5.2 (1912) 477-78. He notes the military sense of the verb in Jer 21.13; Joel 4.11 (p.478). This reading is adopted by Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 382; B. Long, 2 Kings, 81; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 72 n.8. The suggestion, while giving less weight to the reading in the LXX (παρεμβάλω), seems reasonable, making better sense of the text in accordance with the repetition of biblical narrative. Further support comes from its agreement with the synonym in v.18 in which (arguably) the Syrian army attacks (וַיַּרְדּוּ). The difficulties and solutions for verses 8, 9 are described by R. LaBarbera, 'The Man of War and the Man of God: Social Satire in 2 Kings 6:8-7:20,' *CBQ* 46 (1984) 637-51 (639 n.6). The final word of the MT in v.8 (תַּחְנִנִי) is a *hapax legomenon* regarding its form while the final word of v.9 (נִחְרִים), is a *hapax* regarding its pointing: 'The best explanation is to derive both forms from the root *nḥt*, "to go down," treating the first as a metathesized form of *tinḥātū*, with *yod* misread for *waw*, and the second as a mispointed masculine plural participle.'

There are several other explanations: O. Thenius, *Könige*, 300 citing the Pesh. and 2 Kgs 7.12 (cf. 1 Kgs 22.25) argues that תַּחְנִנִי has developed from תַּחְבֵּא [חָבַא, *withdraw, hide*]. He is followed here by R. Kittel, *Die Bücher Der Könige*, HKAT 1.5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), 210; BDB:334, s.v. תַּחְנִנִי, states: 'form very strange.' A. Klostermann, *Die Bücher Samuelis und der Könige*, Kurzgefasster Kommentar zu den heiligen Schriften Alten und Neuen Testaments sowie zu den Apokryphen (Nördlingen: C. H. Beck, 1887), 408 suggests perhaps נִחְבֵּא (hitpa'el *yiqtol* 1cp) 'let us lie in wait' in agreement with LXX<sup>1</sup>, Vulg. Burney agrees that such a reading 'may be adopted' (Notes, 285).

no one could have heard, why not substitute a place name as necessary?<sup>18</sup> The point is that the name of the place (or person) is less important than what we are told (or not told) about it. According to Berlin the narrator here is ‘intentionally abstracting, or generalizing’ since there is some information that is not relevant to the telling of this particular tale: ‘In other words, the narrator in Ruth 4:1 and 2 Kgs 6:8, and David in 1 Sam 21:3, is asserting his control over the story.’<sup>19</sup>

For what purpose then is the authorial presence and the absence of location so palpable? The lack of a name for the ‘place’ is a veritable black hole in view of the appearance of *מקום* six times in 6.1-10.<sup>20</sup> Certainly the referents to *מקום* in 6.1-7 have nothing to do with those in 6.8-23. Yet the frequency does serve to sharpen the reader’s interest and focus attention on the ‘place’. Why the cloak of secrecy that pervades the early portions of 6.8-23? This lack of information contrasts dramatically with a place that will be named later and become the focal point of the action for nearly the remainder of the narrative. Similarly, there are eight occurrences of *אֶשׁ* between 6.1-6.14.<sup>21</sup> The simple cross-story occurrences of these words give us pause to consider the possibility of some relationship between these two stories. The fact that these words do not share referents does not argue against their cohesive function.<sup>22</sup>

Turning first to the occurrences of *אֶשׁ* within these two stories, we note that the word occurs five times within 6.1-7. It points to that confined place where the sons of the prophets dwell before Elisha (*אֶנְחֵנוּ יֹשְׁבֵי־בָיִת לְפָנָיו*, v.1). It is the place in the Jordan where Elisha cast the stick (*וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ־שָׁמָּה*, v.6). Most importantly we find it three times in verse 2 in the context of the Jordan as the new place where the sons of the

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<sup>18</sup> A. Berlin asserts: ‘We must not lightly assume that the biblical tradition forgot things. Ethnic traditions do not easily forget; and if there is a gap or lapse, it is quickly filled in’ (*Poetics*, 153 n.8).

<sup>19</sup> A. Berlin, *Poetics*, 101. Ruth 4.1 and 1 Sam 21:3 are the other places where *אֶלְמִנִי* occurs.

<sup>20</sup> The word occurs at 2 Kgs 6.1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10.

<sup>21</sup> 6.1, 2(3x), 6, 9, 10, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Berlin, ‘Lexical Cohesion,’ 33 states: ‘Repeated words can provide lexical cohesion even if they do not have the same referent.’ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 94 observes how ‘word-motifs’ can ‘establish instructive connections between seemingly disparate episodes.’

prophets will build their larger living quarters. It is as if the narrator wanted the readers (hearers) to mark the importance of this location and the importance of the sound *šām*.

נִלְכְּהֶנָּא עַד־הַיַּרְדֵּן וְנִקְחָה מִשָּׁם אִישׁ קוֹרָה אַחַת וְנִנְעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שָׁם מְקוֹם לְשֹׁבֵת שָׁם

‘Please let us go to the Jordan and let us take from there (*šām*) each man one beam, so that we may make there (*šām*) for ourselves a place to dwell there (*šām*)’ (2 Kgs 6.2).

Not surprisingly this sound is exploited early in the following story. In v.9 Elisha’s warning to the king of Israel is countered by the king’s response in v.10:

הַשָּׂמֶר מֵעַבֵּר הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־שָׁם אָרָם נֹחֲתִים:

‘Be on guard (*hiššāmer*) from passing by<sup>23</sup> this place for there Aram (*ki-šām ʿārām*) is going down’ (2 Kgs 6.9).

וְנִשְׁמַר שָׁם לֹא אַחַת וְלֹא שְׁתַּיִם:

...and he was on guard there (*wēnišmar šām*) not once and not twice (2 Kgs 6.10).

While both LaBarbera and Moore note the word play in 6.9, 10, neither observe the abundance of *š* in the prior story, a feature which would further support their interpretation.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to 6.1-7, a parallel case may be made regarding the word *מְקוֹם*. One of the sons of the prophets asks Elisha to notice the restricted living quarters of their place (*הַיְהוּדָה מְקוֹם*, v.1), to permit them to go the Jordan, and to sanction the building of a ‘place there’ (above 6.2). After the axe-head’s plunge into the water and the disciple’s cry, Elisha asks where it fell and is shown the place (*וַיַּרְאֵהוּ אֶת־הַמְּקוֹם*, 6.6b). Upon bringing the iron to the surface, Elisha commands his disciple to ‘take it up yourself.’ We are informed at the conclusion of the story that this disciple ‘stretched out his hand and took it.’

The word *מְקוֹם* is again used early in the following story. The king of Aram deliberates with his servants and decides to attack at ‘such and such a place.’ The man of God, knowing about this place ‘sends’ (*וַיִּשְׁלַח*, v.9) to the king of Israel

<sup>23</sup> *מֵעַבֵּר* The infinitive with *מִן* is used after verbs of *restraining, ceasing*. See Gibson §109 *Rem* 1.

<sup>24</sup> LaBarbera, ‘Man of War,’ 639-40; Moore notes that while the verb *הַשָּׂמֶר* is not particularly noteworthy, the repetition of the sound causes us to be alert to any ‘special emphasis’ which may be highlighted (*God Saves*, 84-85).

warning him ‘to be on guard passing through this place’ (above 6.9). The king of Israel heeds the warning such that he takes extra precautions (וַיִּשְׁלַח...אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם, v.10) at the ‘place’.

Finally, while recognising the frequency with which the verb הלך occurs in the Old Testament, it is still worth noting its usage in the 6.1-7 where it occurs five times from verses 2-4 and 6.8-23 where it occurs three times in verse 19 alone. The former case emphasises the promise of Elisha’s presence with his disciples as they go to the Jordan (וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתָּם, v.4).<sup>25</sup>

גִּלְקָהּ גָּא עַד-הַיַּרְדֵּן...וַיֹּאמֶר לָבוּ  
וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֶחָד הוּאֵל גָּא וְלָךְ אֶת-שַׁבְרֵיךְ  
וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי אֵלָךְ  
וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתָּם...

‘Permit us to go to the Jordan’...and he said, ‘Go!’ (6.2).<sup>26</sup>  
And one of them said, ‘Please go with your servants’ (6.3a).  
And he said, ‘I myself will go.’ (6.3b)  
And he went with them...(6.4)

In the following story הלך portrays the prophet in a king-like fashion subduing a hostile enemy, leading them into the very heart of Samaria.<sup>27</sup>

לָבוּ אַחֲרַי וְאוֹלִיכָה אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּבְקְשׁוּן וַיֵּלֶךְ אוֹתָם שְׁמֵרוֹנָה  
‘Come after me and I will lead<sup>28</sup> you to the man whom you are seeking.’ And he led them to Samaria (6.19).

The cohesive elements of the first story (6.1-7) and the second (6.8-23) may function to guide us both terminologically and analogically in the creation of a

<sup>25</sup> See J-M §146a(3) for the use of the emphatic personal pronoun where this verse is given as an example of a promise given ‘in reply to an invitation or to a question.’

<sup>26</sup> The permission granted by Elisha is reflected elsewhere in similar grammatical fashion. In 2.16a a jussive of permission גָּא יֵלְכוּ (‘Allow them to go’) is followed by the prophet’s imperative שְׁלַח (‘Send!’). In 6.2 it is the cohortative of permission גִּלְקָהּ גָּא which is followed by the imperative לָבוּ. See J-M §114n.

<sup>27</sup> D. Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the LORD: an Old Testament Spirituality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996) 100, discussing the ‘walking metaphor’ in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties, notes that the phrase הלך אחרי likely originated in a political context where ‘walking after the king’ was used in the sense of ‘joining in the advance of his army.’ Thus to ‘walk after’ is to be ‘in alliance with’.

<sup>28</sup> It is possible to translate the so-called copulative imperfect or *weyiqtol* as a purpose clause: *so that I may lead you* (see J-M §116b; WOC §33.4b). However, Muraoka has elsewhere challenged this traditional view. See the discussion in W. Th. van Peursen, ‘The Verbal System,’ 152.

'coherent mental representation.'<sup>29</sup> Terminologically, we have observed lexical connections between 6.1-7 and the 6.8-23. Analogically there are a series of more subtle narrative similarities: both the prophet and the king of Aram are searching and thus Elisha's question points ahead to the question of the king of Aram. As the prophet questions his servant for the location of the missing axe-head (אָנָה נָפֵל, v.6.6a) so the king of Aram inquires of his servants for the location of the missing prophet (אֵיכָה הוּא, v.13a). In each case the verb רָאָה plays a role in identifying location (6.6b, 13). The 'sending and seizing' by Elisha's servant in 6.7b (וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחֶהוּ) foreshadows the 'sending and seizing' of the king of Aram in 6.13a (וַאֲשַׁלַּח וַאֲקַחְהוּ). In the former case the object is iron while in the latter it is Elisha. The news of 'lost iron' in the former story is replaced by the imminent danger of Aramean chariots and horses surrounding the city in the latter story – a point to which we shall return. Within each story the prophet is confronted by a frantic servant who cries אָהָה אֲדֹנָי. Here Elisha is treated in a manner reserved elsewhere for YHWH only. The phrase אָהָה אֲדֹנָי (vv.5b, 15b) is found at no other place in the Hebrew Bible. In conjunction with אֲדֹנָי it is always in the form אָהָה אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה as an address to the deity.<sup>30</sup>

What sorts of expectations are created in the relationships between these two stories. If the analogies proceeded according to expectations, the king of Aram would reach out his hand and 'take' the prophet as easily as the axe-head is taken in the prior story at Elisha's command. However both 6.1-7 and 6.8-23 manifest a reversal of expectations. In the former case the desire to clear the land is met with the unexpected loss and subsequent retrieval of the very implement needed to perform the task.<sup>31</sup> In the latter case the expected military might of the Aramean army

<sup>29</sup> This statement is made in light of the earlier discussion of coherence in chapter two. Recall that cohesion is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of cohesion; however, it does provide the primary element for coherence building by the reader.

<sup>30</sup> Josh 7.7; Judg 6.22; Jer 1.6; 4.10; 14.13; 32.17; Ezek 4.14; 9.8; 11.13; 21.5.

<sup>31</sup> This reversal of expectations for 2 Kgs 6.1-7 is noted in J. T. Cummings, 'The House of the Sons of the Prophets and the Tents to the Rechabites,' in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica 1978: I. Papers on Old Testament and Related Themes*, JSOTSup 11 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1979), 119-26 (120).

becomes no match for the chariots and horsemen surrounding Elisha; those who come to capture the prophet are themselves captured. At a minimum, the terminological and analogical connections noted invite further reflection on the relationship between these disparate tales. Before further reflection we will take a closer exegetical and thematic look at the remainder of 2 Kings 6.8-23.

### 2 Kgs 6.11-19: My God Saves

The beginning of each verse within the first quarter of the story (vv.8-10) establishes the three persons of power who are the narrative's primary characters. In verse 8 it is the king of Aram who is introduced, in verse 9 it is the man of God, and in verse 10 it is the king of Israel. In each case the figure is anonymous with the prophet surrounded by monarchs on either side. The arrangement of this early portion of the story is repeated in the following three quarters. The two kings (Aram in vv.11-14, Israel in vv.20-23) are placed on either side of the central portion in which attention is focused upon the prophet. Even as actors on the stage they are seeking the prophet either for capturing (v.14) or questioning (v.21).<sup>32</sup> The initial action of both prophet and kings is described in similar fashion (שלח, vv.9, 10, 14). The early anonymity of all three figures is important because it contrasts with the later narrative features that place the prophetic name in bold relief.

The reader is in the dark regarding the specific location of either Aram's attack or Israel's defence. However, unlike the king of Aram, the reader is not in the dark regarding the actions of the man of God. Whether the king of Aram is 'hiding' or 'descending' (see n.17) it is clear that the king of Israel is on high alert due to a previous prophetic warning. Due to the consistent thwarting of the king of Aram's plans he becomes enraged, thinking that one of his own counsellors is conferring with the king of Israel (v.11).<sup>33</sup> Upon learning that his bedroom conversations have

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<sup>32</sup> It is possible that the king of Aram's intent is not hostile, but then why bring such a large force?

<sup>33</sup> The verb סער occurs 7 times in the MT and is attested only here in the Former Prophets (Isa

been ‘tapped’ by prophetic insight, the king moves his attention from Israel (v.8) to the prophet (v.13) as the narrative also makes its transition from king to prophet. The three ‘fifties’ of Ahaziah who earlier sought Elijah on the mountain (2 Kgs 1.9-13) are countered by threefold ‘horses, chariotry and a large army’ which the king sends after the prophet (2 Kgs 6.14a). Two details should be noticed here that provide evidence for a kingly portrayal of Elisha. First, the only other occurrences of **חיל כבד** (ב) in the Hebrew Bible are located in the context of Solomon and Hezekiah (1 Kgs 10.2//2 Chr 9.1 and 2 Kgs 18.17//Isa 36.2).<sup>34</sup> Second, the indefinite **שׂם** noted earlier is, in its final appearance in 6.1-23, given a definite referent: it now refers to Elisha’s presence in Dothan. Elisha’s actions (**וַיִּשְׁלַח־שָׂמָה**, 6.6) sound like those of a king (**וַיִּשְׁלַח־שָׂמָה**, v.14), providing a feature that encourages further consideration of connections between these two stories.

Narrative attention moves away from the king of Israel and towards the prophet in verse 11. As with Elisha’s statement in 2 Kgs 3.14, in which he disparages the presence of the king of Israel, so here – in the mouth of the king of Aram and the response of his servant – we may have a question that functions to criticise the king of Israel. The king of Aram asks:

הֲלוֹא תַגִּידוּ לִי מִי מִשְׁלָנוּ אֶל־מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

‘Will you not make known to me who<sup>35</sup> from among us is for<sup>36</sup> the king of Israel?’ (2 Kgs 6.11b).

54.11; Hos 13.3; Jon 1.11, 13; Hab 3.14; Zech 7.14).

<sup>34</sup> The MT also attests **חיל גדול** (ב) (2 Kgs 7.6; Ezek 17.17; 37.10; Dan 11.13, 25 [2x]); **חיל...ועצום** (Dan 11.25); **חיל רב** (Ezek 38.15). See Even-Shoshan: 365-66.

<sup>35</sup> **מִשְׁלָנוּ** -- The debate about presumed ‘northernisms’ in this section persists. See Burney, *Notes*, 208 for a list of presumed ‘peculiarities of diction’. Burney’s observations have greatly influenced the search for a northern dialect in northern prophetic narratives. For a recent assessment see W. Schniedewind and D. Sivan, ‘The Elijah-Elisha Narratives: a Test Case for the Northern Dialect of Hebrew,’ *JQR* 87 (1997) 303-37 (328-330); Daniel C. Fredericks, ‘A North Israelite Dialect in the Hebrew Bible? Questions of Methodology,’ *HS* 37 (1996) 7-20; Ian Young, ‘The “Northernisms” of the Israelite Narratives in Kings,’ *ZAH* 8.1 (1995) 63-70. Young writes, ‘The relative pronoun *š* – which is widely considered a northernism in the pre-exilic period appears only once in these chapters, in 2 Kings 6.11. This is in the words of the Aramean king to his servants. The rest of the uses of the relative pronoun in these chapters are of the standard *šer*’ (p.65). Young concludes that these presumed northernisms are actually a means of characterisation. The variant grammatical forms are concentrated in the speech of characters in the stories – particularly Elisha and the Arameans. Schniedewind and Sivan are ‘still inclined’ to see *š* as Northern Hebrew but ‘it is not a clear cut case’

One of his servants replies:

לֹא אֲדַגֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּי־אֵלִישָׁע הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יַגִּיד לְמֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים  
אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹר בַּחֲדָר מִשְׁכְּבֶךָ:

'None my lord O king. But Elisha the prophet who is in Israel makes known to the king of Israel the things which you speak in your bedroom' (2 Kgs 6.12).

Who is for the king of Israel? None. He will not return to the narrative until v.21. On the other hand, Elisha's name is withheld until this point in the story. Apart from YHWH, Elisha is the only other proper name within the story. The importance of the prophet's name requires closer examination.

Bob Becking claims that *Elisha* may be taken to mean 'my god saves' or 'my god is noble'; either is possible from a philological perspective.<sup>37</sup> Like Moore he opts for the former with the working hypothesis that the Elisha stories will, in fact, give expression to this meaning of the prophet's name: the author wanted to convince his or her audience of the truth of this expression.<sup>38</sup> Becking makes a self-conscious methodological move in his study turning from a philological point about a proper name to a consideration of the character of the stories in which that name occurs.<sup>39</sup> The present study makes a similar interpretative decision, yet does so more broadly by arguing that the prophet's name and actions contrast with the lack of action, or

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(p.330). Burney (p.285) mentions a number of proposed emendations for this word however Montgomery and Gehman state: '[T]he second word is criticized by some for use of ׀, but this good N Israelite particle is appropriate in citation of a Syrian' (pp.382-83). Cogan and Tadmor hold that emendation is not necessary here since 'the text as given is construable' (p.72 n.11).

<sup>36</sup> The use of ׀ in the sense of *towards* or *in support of* is noted by Burney (p.285) in Hos 3.3; Jer 15.1; Ezek 36.9; Hag 2.17.

<sup>37</sup> Bob Becking, *Een Magisch Ritueel in Jahwistisch Perspectief: literaire structuur en godsdienst-historische achtergronden van 2 Koningen 4:31-38*, Utrechtse Theologische Reeks 17 (Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1992) 29 n.2. According to Becking the name is a short sentence composed of a noun with a 1cs suffix 'my God' which is the subject of a verb. The verb is either שׁוּעַ II parallel to שׁוּעַ or derived from שׁוּעַ I related to the Hebrew noun שׁוּעַ, *noble* (see *BDB*:447; Isa 32.5; Job 34.19). See also id., 'Elisha: "Sha' is my god"?' *ZAW* 106 (1994) 113-16; id., "'Touch for Health..." Magic in II Reg 4, 31-37 with a remark on the History of Yahwism,' *ZAW* 108 (1996) 34-54.

<sup>38</sup> Becking, *Een Magisch Ritueel*, 5. He writes: '...denk ik toch dat de verhalen over Elisa in 2 Koningen uiting willen geven aan deze betekenis van zijn naam.' See also Moore, *God Saves*, 139.

<sup>39</sup> Becking, *Een Magisch Ritueel*, 5

even negative actions, of the king of Israel. The meaning of the prophet's name is contrasted with the treatment of anonymity afforded the king of Israel.

Evidence for Elisha's importance in the present narrative is not lacking. As we have seen the prophet's name is withheld and then revealed in 6.12 at the point after which the king of Israel temporarily disappears from the narrative.<sup>40</sup> Later, in the middle portion of the story, אלישע occurs seven times in the span of five verses (6.17-21). This is the heaviest concentration of the prophet's name for a series of *connected verses* within those stories in which his name occurs.<sup>41</sup> This is especially dramatic in verses 17-18 where Elisha, as the subject of פלל, is prominent both at the beginning, and then again at the end of each verse. Besides Elisha (*cf.* 4.33), within the book of Kings, only three other figures are the subject of this verb: Solomon (1 Kgs 8); the 'man of God' at the request of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13.6); and Hezekiah (19.15, 20; 20.2).<sup>42</sup> The text of vv.17-19 is displayed below to emphasise these observations.

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֱלִישָׁע וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה פְּקַח־נָא אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְאֵה  
וַיִּפְקַח יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינֵי הַנַּעֲר וַיִּרְא  
וַהֲנִיחַ הָהָר מִלֵּא סוּסִים וַרְכַב אִשׁ סְבִיבַת אֱלִישָׁע:

וַיִּרְדּוּ אֵלָיו וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֱלִישָׁע אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲדָנָא  
אֶת־הַגּוֹי־יְהוָה בַּסַּנְגוּרִים וַיִּכֶם בַּסַּנְגוּרִים כְּדָבַר אֱלִישָׁע:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֱלִישָׁע לֹא זֶה הַדְּרֹךְ וְלֹא זֶה הָעִיר  
לְכוּ אַחֲרַי וְאוֹלִיכֶה אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּבְקְשׁוּן  
וַיִּלְךְ אֹתָם שְׁמֹרֹנָה:

<sup>40</sup> W. Brueggemann, 'The Embarrassing Footnote,' *TToday* 44 (1987) 5-14 (9) claims that after Elisha's name is mentioned he 'assumes control of the narrative.'

<sup>41</sup> Only 2 Kgs 2.1-5 comes close where the name is found six times in five verses.

<sup>42</sup> We also note that in Solomon's prayer the verb is applied hypothetically to others praying to YHWH, both the people of Israel (8.33, 35, 44, 48) and the foreigner (v.42). Elsewhere in *Kings* there are other verbs for calling upon the deity: חָנַן, *seek favour, supplicate* (1 Kgs 8.33, 47, 59); חָלָה, *appease, entreat* (2 Kgs 13.4); קָרָא 1 Kgs 8.43 (the alien); 1 Kgs 8.52 (the people of Israel); 1 Kgs 17.20, 21; 18.24-28 (Elijah / prophets of Baal); 2 Kgs 5.11 (Naaman supposing Elisha would come out and 'call on his god'); 2 Kgs 20.11 (Isaiah).

(17) And Elisha prayed and said, 'O YHWH please open his eyes so that he may see.'<sup>43</sup> And YHWH opened the eyes of the servant and he saw and behold, the mountain filled with horses and chariots of fire surrounding<sup>44</sup> Elisha.

(18) And they came down<sup>45</sup> to him and Elisha prayed to YHWH and said, 'Please strike this people with bewilderment.'<sup>46</sup> And he struck them with bewilderment according to the word of Elisha.<sup>47</sup>

(19) And Elisha said to them, 'This is not the way and this is not the city. Come after me and I will lead you to the man whom you are seeking.' And he led them to Samaria.

Elisha becomes the central subject and focus of the narrative and yet there is more here than meets the eye. The careful Aramean, unable to recognise Elisha visually would still be able to recognise him aurally. In Elisha's own words he reveals himself and yet at just this point remains hidden: '...I will lead you *to the man whom...*' – where אֶל-הָאִישׁ, along with the *ā* of the following אֲשֶׁר, mimics the sound of the prophet's name *ʿel-hā-šer ʿā(šēr)*. The prophet's identity remains buried within the phonemes of his supposed altruism.

These observations serve to emphasise Elisha rather than the king of Israel as the real problem for the king of Aram. The narrative focus, like the king of Aram's<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The jussive וַיִּרְאֵה (in pause) follows the imperative. In ל"ה verbs we usually find the full form as opposed to the apocopated form especially when in pause. See J-M §114 g, n. 1; J-M §116d.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 2 Kgs 6.14, 17 and Ps 17.9-11. In both נִקְרָה and סָבַב are used. Perhaps more important is 2 Kgs 11.8 where the words are used of Jehoiada the priest's command to the guards: *you shall surround (וַיִּקְפְּסוּם) the king round about (סָבְבוּ)*. This is an important point in the story; the lamp of David nearly extinguished is being closely guarded. Is the surrounding of Elisha similarly portrayed as the protection of a royal figure?

<sup>45</sup> On four occasions we find kings or their representatives *going down (יָרַד) to him (אֵלָיו)*. In 2 Kgs 3.12 the three kings 'go down to him' because the word of YHWH is with him. A messenger from the king 'comes down to him' in 6.33. Joash the king 'comes down' to him as he lay dying in 13.14. In 6.18 the forces of Aram 'come down to him', yet are dazzled 'according to the word of Elisha.' Note however the counter-argument of A. Rofé, 'Elisha at Dothan (2 Kgs 6:8-23): Historico-literary Criticism Sustained by Midrash,' in R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo and L. H. Schiffman (eds.), *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 345-53. Rofé argues that the subject of the phrase וַיִּרְדּוּ אֵלָיו is the celestial force and not the Arameans. Verse 17 and the first two verses of v.18 are a midrashic exposition of v.16 in an attempt to explain the presence of the רִבִּים (p.352).

<sup>46</sup> The only other occurrence is at Gen 19.11. *BDB:703*, s.v. סָכַרְסָרִים holds that the derivation from נָר is 'highly improbable' and that the סָכַר to cover with a skin, 'lacks demonstration'. They conclude 'at present we must be content with assuming quadrilit. √.' The other Biblical Hebrew word for blindness is עָוֶר (Deut 15.21) or עָוֶרֶן (Deut 28.28; Zech 12.4). Montgomery and Gehman, 383, claim the root is related to נָרַר, which is parallel to *brr*. Gray, 517 suggests 'the phonetic modification of a Shaphel, or causative variation, of the verbal root *nwr* ('to be bright').'

<sup>47</sup> The phrase occurs elsewhere at 2 Kgs 2.22.

<sup>48</sup> Rofé, 'Elisha at Dothan,' 349-50 critiques those scholars who seek to remove divine activity in the story. We are not arguing here that the wonder can be reduced to Elisha's rhetorical skill.

army, moves from Israel's king to Israel's prophet. The king sends 'horses and chariots and a great army' besieging the city, and hence Elisha, by night (6.14).<sup>49</sup> But why are we told that the Arameans move by night? On one hand 'surrounding' and 'besieging' a city by night are merely stereotypical features of conquest accounts.<sup>50</sup> Yet we have noted the importance which 'seeing' (הִרְאָה) plays within 2 Kgs 6.8-23.<sup>51</sup> Is the imminent blinding of the Aramean army foreshadowed in the stereotyped nocturnal activities, while the servant's impending supernatural vision is hinted at in his early encounter?<sup>52</sup> Once concerned with 'who was for the king of Israel', the king of Aram now completes the narrative shift seeking only the capture of one man.

This interpretation differs somewhat from Moore who sees the prophet as one who stands between the two kings in both the literary and military context. For Moore the prophetic word represents 'the balance of power.'<sup>53</sup> While the placement of Elisha between two monarchs is undeniable, we may ask 'to what effect?' Elisha is not portrayed as the fulcrum of two competing entities, but instead fulfils the royal role as defender of the people.

<sup>49</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 88. It is interesting to note the comparable word choices in the LXX and MT from several other passages. Joshua surrounds (περικύκλωσε) the city of Jericho with his army while Elisha is instead surrounded (περικύκλωσαν) by an army. See BAGD:648, s.v. περικυκλόω, *to surround, encircle* w. acc. of a beleaguered city where 2 Kgs 6.14 and Josh 6.13 are cited. In the Hebrew Bible Joshua surrounds Jericho (הִקְיִף Josh 6.3), while Elisha is himself surrounded by a foreign army (וַיִּקְפּוּ). Similarly, as the Arameans surround Elisha, so also the men of Sodom surround (περικύκλωσαν) Lot's door (Gen 19.4). In the only other occurrence in the Hebrew Bible, the men of Sodom are, like the Arameans, struck (הִכּוּ) with blindness (בְּסַרְסָרִים).

<sup>50</sup> K. L. Younger, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, JSOTSup 98 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 74. With respect to Assyrian conquest narratives Younger notes that the 'nightly stage is absolutely stereotyped.'

<sup>51</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of God,' 641-42, Moore, *God Saves*, 88-89. See occurrences 2 Kgs 6.13, 17 (2x), 20 (2x), 21. Also recall 2 Kgs 6.6.

<sup>52</sup> One interpretative decision in v.15 concerns the subject of אֲנִי which some commentators take to be Elisha (Burney, 286; Montgomery and Gehman, 380; Gray, 514; Jones, *Kings*, 2:426). While this may be so, there are no compelling reasons why we must accept Elisha as the subject and the literary structure actually argues against the position. First, the reader perceives events through the eyes of Elisha's servant. This is noted by both Long, *2 Kings*, 86 and Nelson, *Kings*, 186. Second, there can be little doubt that the הִרְאָה of v.17b highlights for the reader the servant's sudden perception of a supernatural reality. This at least suggests that the previous הִרְאָה of v.15a should also be taken as the servant's prior perception of the very real, albeit material, Aramean threat. See T. Zewi, 'The Particles הִרְאָה and הִרְאָה in Biblical Hebrew,' *HS* 37 (1996) 21-37.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 85.

In the prophetic/royal contacts of 2 Kgs 5 and 6.8-23 it is common for scholars to presume a positive relationship between king and prophet, an impression at odds with the other narratives. The evidence for a royal critique in 2 Kgs 5 was presented in the previous chapter. Undoubtedly, in the story under discussion, the prophet with his sentinel-like behaviour, provides the king with useful information. However, it is fair to ask whether this is pushed too far by interpreters.<sup>54</sup> Is royal/prophetic contact necessarily a manifestation of friendliness? Does benefaction necessarily indicate cordiality? Specifically, does the military intelligence provided to the king necessarily indicate that Elisha is on friendly terms with the monarch? Certainly from a larger narrative perspective the prophet appears to be replacing the monarch as defender of the people. This in turn seems to hint at concerns wider than mere elevation of the holy man or helper of the king.

### 2 Kings 6.20-23: Destruction or Dining: the Sparing of the Captives

There are several important questions asked by characters in this section. These questions, in turn, are themselves question-provoking and require an exploration of grammar and syntax. What, for example, should we make of the king's question in 6.21b? What of Elisha's question after his firm prohibition in 6.22a? What is the import of the substitution of dining for destruction in 6.23? Does this bear any relationship to the overall interpretation of the passage established thus far?

As with his servant previously, Elisha asks YHWH to open the eyes of the Arameans who were previously blinded. The prophet's request granted, the captured enemy marauders find themselves suddenly in the midst of Samaria (שָׁמְרוֹן, v.20). This should not be too surprising given the earlier appearances of the verb שָׁמַר in verses 9-10 and the word שָׁמַר.<sup>55</sup> The lack of visual acumen of the Arameans is good

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<sup>54</sup> Note, for example, Moore, *God Saves*, 126, where he claims that Elisha had 'exceedingly positive relations with the king of Israel.'

<sup>55</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 644.

news to the king of Israel; upon seeing his enemies the king asks Elisha if he can finish them off: הָאֲזָכָה אֲזָכָה אָבִי (v.21b). We will begin with a closer look at the grammar and syntax of the king's question.

A number of scholars raise the possibility of emendation to the infinitive absolute הָאֲזָכָה in view of the participles found in the LXX and Pesh.<sup>56</sup> The nuance of the infinitive with the interrogative is such that 'the dubitative modality becomes stronger.'<sup>57</sup> Gibson comments that the infinitive absolute strengthens affirmations 'while it reinforces any sense of supposition or doubt or volition present in conditional clauses or questions or wishes.'<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Hobbs maintains that if the text is interpreted as it stands the grammar, although clumsy, 'could well reflect the inarticulate excitement of the king at his good fortune'.<sup>59</sup> B. Long appears to concur describing the king's words as 'tumbling redundantly with excitement'.<sup>60</sup> Acceptance of the MT reading encourages us to see a king unable to contain himself at the prospect of striking down a captured foe; the text highlights the impending action of the monarch even as he asks the question.<sup>61</sup> If instead, the emendation is

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<sup>56</sup> LXX (πατάξας πατάξω); Pesh. (ܩܬܘܠܐ ܩܬܘܠܐ). Like the Hebrew, Targum Jonathon uses imperfect forms (האקטול אקטול). Acceptance of the proposed emendation would yield a prepositive infinitive absolute (i.e. before the finite verb) as an accusative of internal object. See J-M §123d,f; §125q; Burney, *Notes*, 287; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 383; Jones, *Kings*, 2:428. Elsewhere, the hifil infinitive absolute of נכח is found in the cognate accusative use (complement to a cognate verb) only at Deut 13.16 (הכח חכה) and 2 Kgs 14.10 (הכח הכית). The rarer postpositive position (after the finite verb) is found at 1 Kgs 20.37 where the form is followed by a second infinitive absolute expressing the simultaneity of the actions (see Gibson §101, J-M §123m). Gibson observes that the so-called 'cognate accusative' is more accurately regarded as a 'subject complement' since its equivalent has been discovered with the nominative *-u* ending in Ugaritic final *alef* verbs.

<sup>57</sup> See J-M §123d.

<sup>58</sup> Gibson, *Syntax* §101.

<sup>59</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 72, n.21b. Elsewhere Hobbs comments: 'The king's enthusiasm for such slaughter was fed by the good fortune of having been handed such a prize of war without a fight' (78).

<sup>60</sup> Long, *2 Kings*, 87.

<sup>61</sup> While admittedly 'clumsy grammar', the syntactical constructions are not without precedent. The interrogative, for example, is also found with a hifil *yiqtol* at Judg 20.23, 28; 1 Sam 30.8; Job 39.20. Back to back *yiqtol* forms are somewhat rare but not extremely so: (Num 22.6; Ruth 1.16, 17; 2 Kgs 7.4; 2 Chr 15.2; Ps 25.3; 68.13; 94.23; 115.12; Isa 26.5 which has 2 hifil *yiqtol* forms as in 2 Kgs 6.21 [ישפילנה ישפילה]; Mic 2.6). What is somewhat unique about 2 Kgs 6.21 is the fact that the verbs are each in the first person singular. Yet even this may be found at Ps 68.23 (אשיב אשיב). Note also the troubled text of Jer 51.3.

accepted, the uncertainty of the king's action is underlined. It is perhaps impossible to choose with certainty between these two. Whether there is any genuine interpretative issue at stake remains to be seen. Before reaching any conclusion we must next investigate Elisha's question in 6.22.

The prophet begins with a firm denial of the monarch's request,<sup>62</sup> and then, as earlier to Gehazi (5.26b), follows with a question which has been the subject of some uncertainty among exegetes:

(2 Kgs 6.22a) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תִכֶּה הָאֲשֶׁר שְׁבִיתָ בְּחַרְבְּךָ וּבִקְשָׁתְךָ אֶתֵּה מִכָּה

In rendering אֶתֵּה מִכָּה, along with the interrogative הָאֲשֶׁר שְׁבִיתָ, a number of English translations (RSV, NIV, NASB, REB) render the participle with a modal force: 'Would you kill/slay/destroy those whom you have (not) captured...?' This modal nuance is accepted by a number of scholars.<sup>63</sup> Some versions appeal to an Oriental custom for dealing with prisoners of war:

'Do you kill your own prisoners with sword and bow?' (NJB)<sup>64</sup>

'Do you slay those whom you have taken captive with your sword or bow?' (NAB)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> It is rather puzzling to find Bergen, 'Alternative,' 133 arguing from this text that prophetic power is 'superior in kind but still subordinate to monarchic power.' He appears to ignore the implication of Elisha's strong prohibition. Bergen claims that the king is 'weak and indecisive, but it is still his decision.' Yet the king defers to the wishes of Elisha.

<sup>63</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 382; Gray, *Kings*, 515; Jones, *Kings*, 2:428; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 70; Long, *2 Kings*, 87. Following the LXX<sup>t</sup> Burney, *Notes*, 287; Gray, *Kings*, 515; and E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 11.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 304 read 'those whom you have **not** taken captive.' This is not supported in any other Greek texts and given Lucian's tendencies, Montgomery and Gehman argue for the acceptance of the MT (p.382). These tendencies include frequent additions, duplicate readings, grammatical corrections, explanatory additions, and Hellenistic forms replaced by Attic. See J. T. Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill; Grand Rapids, and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998) 310.

<sup>64</sup> The note in *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) at 2 Kgs 6.22 states: 'Unless a curse of destruction had been pronounced by Yahweh, and apart from individual cases, it was not Israelite custom to kill prisoners of war, see 1 K 20:31.'

<sup>65</sup> The note in the *The Catholic Study Bible* (NAB) at 2 Kgs 6.22 states: '[S]ince the king would not slay prisoners who had surrendered to his power, much less should he slay prisoners captured by God's power. By Oriental custom they became guests within Samaria's walls.'

This variation in modern translations highlights a problem of interpretation.<sup>66</sup> There is a divergence of opinion among commentators regarding the typical treatment of prisoners of war. Some claim that the outright killing of prisoners of war was common practice.<sup>67</sup> Others hold that captives were normally spared.<sup>68</sup> The division of scholarly opinion here likely reflects the diversity apparent in the sources of the ancient Near East. While it is true that numerous war campaigns of ancient kings reveal the sparing of prisoners of war, there are also cases where no quarter is given.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 382.

<sup>67</sup> Burney, *Notes*, 287; Gray, *Kings*, 515 n.(d) comments: 'It was regular to strike down prisoners of war'; Jones, *Kings*, 2:428; House, *Kings*, 277. Of particular interest is the entry in *TWOT*, s.v. שָׁבָה. The author claims: 'Since confinement facilities were nigh unheard of in the OT, usually after battle the surviving male adults were put to the sword' (p.895). As primary evidence for the common-place slaughter of males the author cites 1 Sam 30.2 and states: 'Thus after the Amalekites smote Ziklag, 1 Sam 30:2 tells us that they "had taken captive the women," and the verses which follow show that the children were also among these prisoners.' Unfortunately, this lends no support to the author's position since there were in fact no men in Ziklag for the Amalekites to capture and kill. David and his men were with Achish going to wage war against the Philistines (1 Sam 28.1; 29.11). The author's point is better supported by the rules for warfare in Deut 20.10. If a town does not submit peacefully, the males are to be struck with the 'mouth of the sword' and the women and children are to be taken captive. Cf. Num 31.7-12.

<sup>68</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 78; Nelson, *Kings*, 187; Wiseman, *Kings*, 210; Provan, *Kings*, 198. Hobbs comments: 'Under normal circumstances of war, prisoners would be spared as the spoils of war. They would be used as slaves.' However, the idea that captives were customarily made slaves is overturned by the study of B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979). Oded claims that it 'was very rare' to enslave deportees (p.115).

<sup>69</sup> A detailed look at this question is beyond the scope of the present study. To support his point that prisoners were generally spared Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 78 cites *ANET*, 277-322. On the sparing of prisoners see *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 278a; 283 b,c; 284b-287b *passim*. However there is also evidence for the capture and killing of survivors (*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 276b; 288a). This final citation (288a) from the Prism of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) reveals, in one campaign, the variety of treatments afforded a defeated people: 'I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime [viz., they had handed Padi their king over to 'Hezekiah the Jew'] and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city. The (common) citizens who were guilty of minor crimes, I considered prisoners of war. The rest of them, those who were not accused of crimes and misbehavior, I released.' While this reveals the variety of treatments given prisoners it does not fully resolve the question of 2 Kgs 6 where a prophet, not a king, orders the *release* of an armed force rather than civilians. See also 2 Chr 28.11 where the prophet Oded orders the release of captives. Younger, *Conquest* provides examples of both sparing (p.159) and destroying (p.98, 235-36) captives. The question of 'how prisoners in the ancient Near East were treated' is much too broad. It is likely that there were variations in the way that people groups (and individual kings within people groups) treated prisoners. Younger, *Conquest*, hints at this: 'The Hittite imperial ideology was very similar to the Assyrian ideology, although it placed less emphasis on "an ideology of terror" than its Assyrian counterpart' (163). The variety of treatments for

Likewise biblical narrative itself does not present a unified view for the treatment of war captives. The ‘rules of warfare’ in Deuteronomy 20 limit the sparing of enemies to those who are both far away and who likewise submit to the terms of peace. If the far-away town does not submit to the terms of peace and surrender, the males are to be struck with the ‘mouth of the sword’ (Deut 20.13).<sup>70</sup> Those cities nearby however, are to be subjected to utter destruction (Deut 20.16-17). Elsewhere, the kings of Israel are known as מלכי חסד (1 Kgs 20.31a), but when Ahab releases Ben-Hadad, YHWH himself is angered (1 Kgs 20.42).<sup>71</sup>

Overall it is difficult to assess ‘typical’ treatment of prisoners. However, returning to grammatical considerations, it is possible to read the prophet’s question with an emphasis that removes Elisha’s question from a habitual notion of what-kings-*typically*-do, to a query of what this *particular* king is presently preparing to do. It is difficult to see why the predicative participle in the phrase אָתָּה מַכֶּה must be rendered with the modal sense, ‘would you strike.’ First, the participle is the primary form for actions ongoing at the time of speaking<sup>72</sup> or the immediate future.<sup>73</sup> A modal

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prisoners is confirmed by G. Mitchell, *Together in the Land. A Reading of the Book of Joshua*, JSOTSup 134 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 54.

<sup>70</sup> In our verse it appears odd that שָׁבָה should govern the prepositional phrase rather than נָכָה. Although, ‘striking with the sword’ (נָכָה + בַּ + חֶרֶב) occurs in a handful of verses (Josh 11.10; 2 Sam 12.9; 2 Kgs 19.37//Isa 37.38; Jer 20.4; 26.23; Ezek 5.2), נָכָה is dominant as the governing verb of the fixed phrase לִפְי־חֶרֶב. Thus while ‘...striking with your sword and with your bow those whom...’ is a possible translation of 6.22 it is less likely.

<sup>71</sup> Ben-Hadad’s servants have a very selective memory (*cf.* 1 Kgs 20.21). There are examples of captives being spared (Gen 34.29; Num 21.1; Deut 21.10; 2 Sam 12.30-31; 1 Kgs 8.45-50; 2 Chr 21.17; 28.5, 8, 11, 17; Is 61.1); and captives being put to death (Deut 13.16; 20.13; 2 Chr 25.12; Jer 20.4). In 2 Sam 8.2 David spares some and kills others. The question of total destruction (חֶרֶם) is prevalent in Joshua. For recent treatments see G. Mitchell, *Together in the Land*, 51-82; J. P. U. Lilley, ‘Understanding the *HEREM*,’ *TynBul* 44 (1993) 169-77; L. L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis*, JSOTSup 226 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 51-65. Mitchell notes that while there are parallels to the Assyrian annals, there is nothing that quite matches the function of חֶרֶם in Joshua (p.54).

<sup>72</sup> See J. Joosten, ‘The Predicative Participle in Biblical Hebrew,’ *ZAH* 2 (1989) 128-159; *id.*, ‘The Indicative System of the Biblical Hebrew Verb,’ in E. van Wolde (ed.), *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996*, BIS 29 (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1997) 51-71. According to Joosten (1997:59), the expression of ‘the real present,’ i.e., action that is ongoing at the time of speaking, ‘can only be expressed by means of the predicative participle.’ See also J-M §121 c-d.

<sup>73</sup> J-M §121e, sees this as an ‘extension’ of its use as a present: ‘A future action, mainly an

rendering would be more likely if the *yiqtol* (תִּבְקֶה) were present in the text.<sup>74</sup> Second, there are several grammatical points that argue against taking, ‘Do you strike?’, in the sense of, ‘Are you in the habit of striking?’ If this phrase is viewed as a ‘general truth,’ a ‘truth of experience,’ or a ‘habitual action’ of the king, then again we would expect a *yiqtol* form for its expression. Muraoka writes: ‘Biblical Hebrew has no verb which corresponds to Lat. *solere*, *to be in the habit of*. The *yiqtol* is sufficient to express this.’<sup>75</sup> Finally, the somewhat unique word order places emphasis upon the fronted object.<sup>76</sup> We conclude that it is best to take the participle in a near future sense:<sup>77</sup>

‘Are you about to strike those whom you have captured with your sword and with your bow?’

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approaching action, is represented as being already in progress.’

<sup>74</sup> Joosten, ‘Indicative System,’ 57-58. Joosten argues that *yiqtol* is basically a modal form and should be removed from the indicative system. He also decries the lack of place given the participle (p.59). Cases like Gen 37.15-16 are instructive: in answer to the question מִדֵּה־תִּבְקֶשׁ, Joseph replies, אֲחִי־אֵחָי אֲנִי־מִבְקֶשׁ. J-M 113§d claims that a *yiqtol* (אֲבַקֶּשׁ) form in the response would work just as well insofar as time and aspect are concerned and that the use of the participle is driven by the presence of a pronoun, usual in answers to questions. Joosten however points out that even here the action is not ‘real’ but questioned (p.58). Difficult for Joosten’s position is a comparison of 2 Kgs 6.19 and Jael’s words to Barak in Judg 4.22. The former utilizes the *yiqtol* (תִּבְקֶשׁוּן) the latter the participle (מִבְקֶשׁ) in nearly identical statements. This does not diminish the point made in 6.22 since we are dealing with a predicative participle. I am grateful for M. Rogland for bringing Judg 4.22 to my attention.

<sup>75</sup> See J-M §113c, n.3. In note 2 Muraoka states that the use of the participle (*qotel*) to portray truths of experience or general truths is ‘rather rare.’ It is also important to keep in mind that 2 Kgs 6.22 is direct discourse; Elisha is speaking to the king in present time within the narrative. This is not a denial that the participle may be used of habitual actions in *past* contexts (e.g., מִבְּיָמַי in 1 Kgs 17.6).

<sup>76</sup> Word order and emphasis are complex issues and one finds disparate comments in the literature. For example, D. A. Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, 17, claims that the combinations VOS, OSV and OVS are ‘extremely uncommon’ and that the last [OVS] is ‘virtually unheard of.’ This contradicts Driver, *Tenses*, §208 (1), who holds that OVS is ‘fairly frequent’ and functions ‘to throw emphasis on the object.’ This is likewise the position of GCK §142f (a). 2 Kgs 6.22 is mentioned in GKC §142 (d), n.1, where, following Driver §208 (2), it is claimed that the sequence OSV ‘occurs more frequently in noun-clauses with a participial predicate’ as well as in interrogative sentences ‘in all which cases the emphasized object is placed before the natural sequence of *subject-predicate*.’ In a discussion of OVS and OSV, T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Mages Press, 1985) 39 claims that ‘In the majority of such examples emphasis or contrast would account for the deviating sequence, while in others different causes have been revealed’. He cites 2 Kgs 6.22 as an example of OSV order used for emphasis (p. 39, n.97). Thus, contra Driver §208 (2), who believes the OSV is ‘exceedingly rare, except with the participle,’ Muraoka does not think that this particular word order is explained due to the presence of predicate participle. Adding to the overall complexity of the verse under discussion is the fact that it is an interrogative which begins with a relative particle.

<sup>77</sup> It is interesting that the LXX translates here with the present tense τύπτεις.

The prior discussion encourages acceptance of the clumsy grammar of 6.21b. Rather than emphasising the king's uncertainty, Elisha's strong prohibition (לֹא תִקֶּה) and following question suggests a king anxious to commence the slaughter. While this may be an attempt to avoid his father's sin,<sup>78</sup> it seems more likely to be a chance to repeat Ahab's 'great slaughter' (מִכַּה גְדוֹלָה) of Aramean horses and chariots in 1 Kgs 20.21. This is supported by the conclusion of the story whereby Elisha's command that the king of Israel feed, water and send the Arameans to their master, results not in מִכַּה גְדוֹלָה, but rather in כְּרַה גְדוֹלָה (6.23) and a reversal of the 'ideology of terror' found in the ancient Near East. So why does Elisha order the freeing of the captives? This may be readily explained if in fact the prophet is being painted in royal colours. Cogan and Tadmor note the sparing of captives as a 'discernible topos' in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. In such cases the captives were freed 'so that they may sing the praises of the victorious monarch.'<sup>79</sup> As with Naaman, the Arameans are freed by their captor so that they may 'spread the word of his greatness.'<sup>80</sup>

### *Land Clearing and Chariot Fearing: Elisha and the Exodus/Conquest Traditions*

The present chapter has moved in hourglass fashion thus far. First, Elisha was interpreted as a prophet of restoration. Narrowing the focus, lexical connections and narrative relationships between 6.1-7 and 6.8-23 were noted. This provided for the possibility of reading 6.1-7 in light of 6.8-23. Having passed through the neck of the hourglass and explored 6.8-23 in some detail, we are now in a position to open up our investigation again in order to view together the two stories of 6.1-23.

Earlier we questioned the positioning of 6.1-7. Why was it set in its present position rather than some other locus? Casting a wider narrative net may help to construct an answer. From Genesis-2 Kings there are similarities at several places

<sup>78</sup> A possibility raised by Provan, *Kings*, 198.

<sup>79</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 75, n.2.

<sup>80</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 75.

that appear to be too contextually analogous to be merely coincidental. Words held in common with the Moses/Joshua stories, and, in the case of Joshua, the actual thematic flow of a particular passage may reflect an oscillation of narrative traditions.<sup>81</sup> First, we note that, with respect to the axe-head, Elisha commands his servant to ‘Pick it up yourself’ (הָרֵם לָךְ, 6.7). From Genesis to 2 Kings the hifil imperative of the verb רִים is found in only two other places.<sup>82</sup> In each instance Moses and Joshua, along with the people of God, are found at important crossing points. In the first instance (Exod 14.16), the people are about to cross יַם־סוּף when YHWH commands Moses to ‘lift up (הָרֵם) your staff’. The second instance is found in Joshua 4.5. Joshua and the people have just crossed the Jordan and Joshua immediately commands the twelve representatives of the people to return to the middle of the Jordan ‘and each man take up (וְהָרִימוּ לָכֶם) a stone.’ This verse more precisely reflects the syntagm of 2 Kgs 6.7.<sup>83</sup>

Second, we also note the rare usage of צוּף. The reader is informed that Elisha threw a stick into the Jordan and ‘made the iron float’ (וַיִּצֹף הַבְּרִזָּל, 6.6b). The word is uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only two other times. Besides 2 Kgs 6.6 it is found again in the hifil only at Deut 11.4 where Moses recalls YHWH’s deliverance:

וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְחַיִּל מִצְרַיִם לְסוּסָיו וּלְרִכְבּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיף אֶת־מֵי יַם־סוּף עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם  
 ‘And that which he did to the army of Egypt, to his horses and to his chariot, how he made the waters of the Red Sea overflow them...’

<sup>81</sup> The approach taken here is akin to K. Nielsen, ‘Intertextuality and Hebrew Bible,’ in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds.), *IOSOT Congress Volume, Oslo 1998*, VTSup 80 (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), 17-31. Particularly important is the concept of the textual *marker* which leads to an intertext defined as ‘another text which, by entering into a dialogue with the text before us, contributes to its understanding’ (p.23). In ‘striking’ cases Nielsen is not averse to seeing these as author or editor intended. On the dangers of this approach see A. Berlin, ‘Literary Exegesis of Biblical Narrative: Between Poetics and Hermeneutics’ in J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson, Jr. (eds.), *“Not in Heaven.” Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 120-28. Berlin is concerned that by use of such a method hermeneutics is confused with poetics; an interpretative manoeuvre is obfuscated by an imagined compositional strategy (p.120).

<sup>82</sup> Overall the hifil imperative of this word is relatively uncommon: Exod 14:16; Josh 4:5; 2 Kgs 6.7; Ps 74.3; Isa 13.2; 40.9 (2x); 57:14; 62:10; Ezek 21.31; 45.9.

<sup>83</sup> That is the hifil imperative of רִים + ל + a suffixed pronoun.

YHWH and Elisha are the only causative agents associated with this verb. YHWH caused the waters of יַם־סוּף to flow over (הֶצִיף) the chariots of Egypt while Elisha causes iron to rise (וַיִּצָרֵף) to the surface. Should we view in the rising iron the return of aggressive forces and Elisha's control of them?

J. F. A. Sawyer argues that the word ברזל would have had negative connotations for several reasons. First, the word has no Hebrew or Semitic etymology. While one must be careful in assessing etymological data, the foreign nature of the word gives 'added effect to its recurring usage in connection with Israel's barbaric enemies.'<sup>84</sup> Second, iron implements throughout the period covered by the OT were 'clumsier and uglier than bronze' as well as being of 'inferior quality.' Finally, iron technology itself frequently failed to produce the desired products and thus the iron smith was not a highly regarded figure. Sawyer concludes that ברזל was 'an emotive term, suggesting, in almost all its occurrences, foreign aggression and brutality.'<sup>85</sup>

Now it does not follow, nor is it claimed, that ברזל suggests foreign aggression in 6.5-7 merely because it may do so in numerous other places. On the other hand, following hard upon the elevation of ברזל, the narrative provides for the immediate return of a foreign aggressor (6.8). In fact, it is syntactically possible to take the periphrastic construction which begins verse 8 as indicative of temporal overlap: 'At just that time the king of Aram was waging war...'<sup>86</sup> This would be a strong syntactical feature drawing the two stories together. The description of the axe-

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<sup>84</sup> J. F. A. Sawyer, 'The Meaning of *barzel* in the Biblical Expressions "Chariots of Iron", "Yoke of Iron", etc.,' in J. F. A. Sawyer and D. J. A. Clines, *Midian, Moab and Edom. The History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia*, JSOTSup 24 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983) 129-134 (131). Sawyer highlights numerous places in which iron is associated with numerous of Israel's enemies.

<sup>85</sup> Sawyer, 'Meaning,' 133.

<sup>86</sup> WOC §37.7.1b, cites this verse under the following rubric: 'Sometimes the temporal notion seems to be more precisely "at just that time..."' The verse is then translated by WOC: 'The king of Aram *being then at war* with Israel, he took counsel with his staff.' Under Aramaic influence the periphrastic construction may have the same sense as a perfect (WOC §37.7.1c). Thus the use of 'aramaizing periphrastic' in 1 Kgs 22.35 and our verse may be due to the fact that both involve wars with the Arameans, so Schniedewind and Sivan, 'Elijah-Elisha,' 319.

head's return to the surface is followed by the command  $\text{הָרֵם לְךָ}$ , raising the possibility that this rare hifil imperative is playing off of the word  $\text{הָרַם}$  and thus pointing ahead to the next story.

Among the notions encapsulated by  $\text{הָרַם}$  are the 'irrevocable renunciation' of interest in the object devoted. When applied to persons there is no room for treaty or enslavement and thus the term gained the semantic equivalence of utter destruction.<sup>87</sup> Moore points out that while the Elijah/Elisha narratives reflect the exodus/conquest traditions, there is an important difference: Elisha appears to reverse the 'traditional pattern' regarding the execution of the ban.<sup>88</sup> This is observed in the interaction between king and prophet previously discussed whereby at the command of the latter, dining replaces destruction. But it is likewise observable in Elisha's question to Gehazi (5.26) and the escape of the Arameans in the following narrative (7.7).<sup>89</sup> To formulate this in terms familiar to the Exodus, the waters covering the enemy have been turned back, the iron has risen to the surface, the freed Arameans will live to fight another day. Hazael is in fact waiting in the wings (8.12). Elisha, recognising no room for treaty or enslavement 'takes up' the Aramean force where one would have expected the opposite result and, instead of their destruction he orders food for them.

We have observed the narrator's presence and shared lexical terms in the two stories of 2 Kgs 6.1-23. Along with this there are some uncommon but shared lexical forms located within 2 Kgs 6.6-7 and at other important, even climactic points of the Moses/Joshua traditions. Finally, the return of  $\text{בְּרִזָּל}$  to the surface may serve as a reminder that foreign aggression is at the door. We will further substantiate this latter point in our concluding chapter. For the present, let us assume that the interpretation advanced thus far encourages 6.1-23 to be read in light of the Moses/Joshua

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<sup>87</sup> J. P. U. Lilley, 'HEREM,' 176-77.

<sup>88</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 141-42.

<sup>89</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 141.

traditions. Is there any story or set of stories that parallels the pattern found in 6.1-23? The stories in 6.1-23 move broadly from story one (6.1-7), in which trees are cut down in an attempt to acquire more space for the burgeoning population of the sons of the prophets, to story two (8-23) with its capture of horses and chariots which are later released. We believe a similar narrative pattern is to be found in Joshua 17.14-18.<sup>90</sup>

In Josh 17.14 the sons of Joseph approach Joshua wondering why they have received only one lot and one portion since YHWH has blessed them with increasing numbers (17.14b). After hearing their complaint Joshua issues the challenge:

אִם־עַם־רַב אַתָּה עָלֶיךָ לָךְ הַיַּעֲרָה וּבְרֵאתָ לָךְ שָׁם בְּאֶרֶץ הַפְּרִזִּי וְהַרְפָּאִים כִּי־אֵץ לָךְ הַר־אֶפְרַיִם  
 'If you are a numerous people go up yourself to the forest and clear for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim since the hill country of Ephraim is too confined for you' (Josh 17.15).

This arrangement is not satisfactory to the sons of Joseph – the hill country is not enough. Yet they fear the 'chariots of iron' (רֶכֶב בְּרִזָּל, v.16) held by the Canaanites who live in Beth-shean and the valley of Jezreel.<sup>91</sup> Joshua responds by offering both a challenge and a promise in view of the growth of the tribe: Joseph will gain the hill country even though it is a forest and he will dispossess (יִרְשׁ) the strong, chariot-driving Canaanites (vv.17-18).

It is worthwhile to compare the differences and similarities in these texts. Both 2 Kgs 6.1-23 and Josh 17.14-18 begin with a discussion of the tight quarters. In the

<sup>90</sup> This is not a denial that other stories may share themes and patterns with portions of 6.1-23 (e.g., Josh 11.6-15).

<sup>91</sup> The LXX here reads ἵππος ἐπιλεκτος καὶ σίδηρος. There is not a similar synecdoche in the Hebrew Bible in which בְּרִזָּל is substituted for רֶכֶב בְּרִזָּל. The latter phrase occurs at Josh 17.16, 18; Judg 1.19; 4.3, 13. R. Drews, 'The "Chariots of Iron" of Joshua and Judges,' *JSOT* 45 (1989) 15-23, argues that 'chariots of iron' would likely refer either to scythed chariots of the Persians or chariots with iron tires found as early as the time of Sennacherib. Neither of these would have been available in the time period portrayed in Joshua and Judges and thus the phrase is an anachronism. For an opposing position see A. R. Millard, 'King Og's Bed and Other Ancient Ironmongery' in L. Eslinger and G. Taylor (eds.), *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical and Other Studies in the Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, JSOTSup 67 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) 481-92. A more direct response to Drews is found in A. R. Millard, 'Back to the Iron Bed: Og's or Procrustes?,' in J. A. Emerton (ed.), *IOSOT Congress Volume*, VTSup 61 (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 193-203.

former as in the latter the 'blessing of the land is not equal to the blessing in numbers.'<sup>92</sup> These complaints about small places arise among the 'sons of Joseph' as Israel settles the land in Joshua and among the 'sons of the prophets' on the doorstep of exile in Kings. The concept arises once more as a harbinger of hope in Isa 49.20 where the *בְּנֵי שְׂקָלֶיךָ* born during the exile will say *צֶר-לִי הַמָּקוֹם*.<sup>93</sup> This brings to mind YHWH's promise that there would be neither 'death nor miscarriage' (2 Kgs 2.21).

To meet the need for more space the sons of Joseph are required to clear the land themselves. In Joshua 17 there is a fear of attempting to possess the plains due to the presence of Canaanites and their chariots while 2 Kings 6 moves us into a completely new story whose focus is Elisha and the threat of Aramean chariots and horses. Joshua promises that the Canaanite chariots will be driven from the land while Elisha issues the command *אֶל-תִּירָא* to his servant at the sighting of the Aramean host. In each case the chariots and horsemen of the enemy are offset by Israel's larger numbers, whether seen or unseen.

Elisha's location at Dothan (v.13) has 'received much attention and various interpretations.'<sup>94</sup> The instances of *מָקוֹם* with no named referent makes the prophet's location in Dothan stand out all the more. In the only other mention in the Hebrew Bible it is the place where Joseph was sold into slavery (Gen 37.17). It was a strategic location along the trade route between Damascus and Egypt and at the head of the valley which led to the Jezreel plain.<sup>95</sup> However, the tactical locale is not the reason that we find Elisha here. From a geographical viewpoint these three narratives (Gen 37, Josh 17, 2 Kgs 6.8-23) portray events within roughly the same vicinity.

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<sup>92</sup> T. C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC 7 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 192.

<sup>93</sup> The words used in these passages are not identical: 2 Kgs 6.1; Isa 49.20 use *צֶר* while Josh 17.15 uses *אִוִּי*.

<sup>94</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 2:426. He concurs with Schmitt that a tradition about an unnamed prophet from Dothan has been attached to Elisha.

<sup>95</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 516; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 381; Wiseman, *Kings*, 210; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 12-50*, WBC 2 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994) 354: 'Dothan lies close to the main trade route through Palestine, the Via Maris, which cuts across the plain of Jezreel from the Sea of Galilee to pass along the coastal plain to Egypt.'

Joseph is sold into slavery and taken to Egypt in Dothan, where Elisha is now besieged.<sup>96</sup> In Josh 17.16 the sons of Joseph, seeking more land, fear chariot attacks from the Valley of Jezreel to the Northeast and Beth-shean to the Southwest. These observations require further development.

James Kugel observes that outside of Genesis, 'Joseph' becomes the progenitor of the peoples living in the North, namely Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>97</sup> The name 'Joseph' along with the 'house' or 'sons of Joseph' is identified with a 'geopolitical reality.'<sup>98</sup> The lands acquired by Joseph's descendants are known particularly for their abundance: 'Joseph's blessing stresses the fruitfulness of his land and people, the physical bounty, apparently, that was the lot of the Northerners.'<sup>99</sup> Joseph's name eventually becomes a synonym for the North.<sup>100</sup> Within Kings the kingdom division itself, at least in part, is due to the Solomon's mistreatment of 'all the forced labour of the house of Joseph' (1 Kgs 11.28). Bringing these several strands together and in absence of any unequivocally positive evaluation of a Northern king, Elisha functions as a transitional royal figure and a final northern prophet in Kings, who holds out a promise for security against invaders and restoration of the fruitfulness of

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<sup>96</sup> On the issue of geographical names as markers for intertexts see K. Nielsen, 'Intertextuality,' 23.

<sup>97</sup> James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 13-27 (14-17).

<sup>98</sup> Kugel, *Potiphar's House*, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Kugel, *Potiphar's House*, 15.

<sup>100</sup> Kugel, *Potiphar's House*, 16. For Joseph's rejection see Amos 6.6; Obad 1.18; Zech 10.6; Ps 78.67 and restoration see Ezek 37.19; 47.13; Amos 5.15. We find בְּיַת יוֹסֵף at Josh 17.17; 18.5; Judg 1.22, 23, 35; 2 Sam 19.21; 1 Kgs 11.28; Amos 5.6; Obad 1.18; Zech 10.6. The question arises as to the relationship between the 'adulterous North' as Joseph's sons and 'Joseph the Righteous,' who in his refusal of Potiphar's wife became in later interpretation a model of chastity for the pious. Kugel comments that for post-exilic readers Joseph's refusal of Potiphar's wife, 'came to loom larger and larger in the imagination' (p.22). Kugel provides several hypotheses for why such a minor part of the story came to play a large role in later interpretation. It may be possible that his development arose not only because of Joseph's appeal as a symbol of sexual purity, and thus a model for the pious, but also for the symbolic use of Joseph as an example of religious purity. Joseph's refusal of Potiphar's wife is in effect a refusal of idolatry. In this way Joseph becomes an example for, and contrasts with his descendants who committed 'spiritual harlotry' (2 Kgs 17).

the northern kingdom. This is the whole point of the appellation, 'chariots and horsemen of Israel', as Rofé has observed:

To my mind, in this passage the appellation reflects the original meaning, that is Elisha as the deliverer of his people in war. In the course of the Aramean crisis (839-802 B.C.E.), Elisha had been left as Israel's sole defense; he replaced the whole corps of cavalry now extinct. As against this, in 2 Kgs 6:17 the display of the heavenly chariotry around Elisha is only a literal interpretation of the original metaphorical epithet. According to this method of exposition, why was Elisha called the 'chariots and horses of Israel'? Because he was surrounded, especially when menaced, by an invisible celestial cavalry, which protected him.<sup>101</sup>

With particular reference to the story at hand, Elisha's location in Dothan is not a coincidence. The sons of Joseph receive from Joshua the promise and challenge of an enlarged inheritance in same region where their progenitor was once carried away to slavery. Elisha likewise, albeit temporarily, provides expanded places for the sons of the prophets in the first story (1-7) and in the second (8-23) prevents Joseph's descendants from losing to the Arameans an inheritance previously granted.

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<sup>101</sup> Rofé, 'Elisha at Dothan,' 352.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA (2 KGS 6.24-7.20)

The story of Samaria's siege has drawn increased scholarly attention in recent years<sup>1</sup> and is considered the most complex of the Elisha narratives.<sup>2</sup> Moore and LaBarbera each treat the story in a bi-partite manner.<sup>3</sup> Parker on the other hand, treats the story in three parts.<sup>4</sup> We prefer to treat the story in four parts based on changes of participant which coincide with changes of setting and syntax: (1) exposition of the crisis (6.24-31); (2) prophecy of relief from the crisis (6.32-7.2); (3) fulfilment of the prophecy (7.3-16); (4) recapitulation (7.17-20)<sup>5</sup>

#### The Cry to the Monarch

Initially, the story establishes the setting against which the ensuing action will transpire (vv. 24-25). The phrase וַיְהִי אֶחָד־יָמֵינוּ (v. 24) is a 'vague connector' and this, along with the arrival of Ben-hadad's army so soon after dismissal of the marauding bands of Arameans (v. 23), may suggest a unit distinct from the prior story in vv. 8-

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<sup>1</sup> L. Lanner, 'Cannibal Mothers and Me: A Mother's Reading of 2 Kings 6.24-7.20,' *JSOT* 85 (1999) 107-16; M. A. Zipor, 'The Cannibal Women and Their Judgment before the Helpless King (2 Kings 6.24ff),' *Abr-Nahrain* 35 (1998) 84-94; S. B. Parker, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions: Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 120-24; S. W. Holloway, 'Antiochian Temporal Interpolations in 2 Kgs 6,24-7,20,' *Bib* 78 (1997) 543-47; H. S. Pypser, 'Judging the Wisdom of Solomon: the two-way effect of Intertextuality,' *JSOT* 59 (1993) 25-36 [reply to S. Lasine]; S. Lasine, 'The Ups and Downs of Monarchical Justice: Solomon and Jehoram in an Intertextual World,' *JSOT* 59 (1993) 37-53 [rejoinder H. S. Pypser]; S. Lasine, 'Jehoram and the Cannibal Mothers (2 Kings 6:24-33): Solomon's Judgment in an Inverted World,' *JSOT* 50 (1991) 27-53; J. C. Greenfield, 'Doves' Dung and the Price of Food: the topoi of 2 Kings 6:24-7:2,' in D. Garrone and F. Israel, *Storia e Tradizioni di Israele. Scritti in onore di J. Alberto Soggin* (Brescia: Paideia, 1991) 121-26. R. LaBarbera, 'The Man of War and the Man of God: Social Satire in 2 Kings 6:8-7:20,' *CBQ* 46 (1984) 637-51.

<sup>2</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 384.

<sup>3</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 645; Moore, *God Saves*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Parker, *Stories*, 120.

<sup>5</sup> The verses in bold each commence with a subject. In more detailed fashion Long, *2 Kings*, 89-90 sets out the following structure: (1) background of the crisis (vv. 24-25); (2) severity of the crisis (vv. 26-31); (3) prophecy of relief from the crisis (vv. 32-7.2); (4) resolution of the crisis (3-16a); (5) fulfilment of the oracle (vv. 16b-20).

23.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand this loose connection does encourage us to ask whether one story ought to be read in the light of the other. The narrator of the present tale relates that although there were no further raids, Ben-hadad brought his entire army (בְּלִ-מַחְנֵהוּ) against Samaria.<sup>7</sup> The text is ambiguous as to whether the siege brought about the 'great famine' directly; however, the presence of וְהָיָה זָרִים עֲלֵיהָ hints at some role in the severity of the famine.<sup>8</sup>

Having established the background and the identity of the Aramean king Ben-hadad,<sup>9</sup> the narrator proceeds to relate an encounter in verse 26 between the ever-anonymous king of Israel and one of his subjects. Others have explored the contrasts and similarities between Solomon's judgment (1 Kgs 3) and the situation in 2 Kgs 6.24-31.<sup>10</sup> For our purposes it is interesting that in each case the confrontation of the king with the needs of a citizen in distress follows immediately upon a feast previously given by the king (1 Kgs 3.15-16; 2 Kgs 6.23, 26). The king of 2 Kgs 6 has earlier interacted with other political or military figures (2 Kgs 3, 5) and with Elisha (2 Kgs 3, 5, 6.8-23), but this is the first instance where he is called upon to meet the needs of one of his citizens. As he passes along (עָבַר) the wall a woman cries out to him (וְאִשָּׁה צָעָקָה). The use of this verb must not be passed by too quickly.

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<sup>6</sup> See Jones, *Kings*, 2:429-30 and Long, *2 Kings*, 91 for detailed discussions of compositional theories.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar construction (אֶת-כָּל-מַחְנֵהוּ) ... (וַיִּקְבֹּץ) see 1 Sam 29.1 of the gathering of Philistines at Aphek.

<sup>8</sup> Commentators who note the problems associated with 'asses heads' and 'doves dung' as food, point to the similar statement from Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 24. See Burney, *Notes*, 288; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 384-85; Jones, *Kings*, 2:431, Cogan and Tadmor *II Kings*, 79. We agree with the assessment of Auld, *Kings*, 174-75 that these 'are the province of the story-teller rather than the economic historian' preparing us for the grim story on the horizon.

<sup>9</sup> Burney, *Notes*, 287 observes that if the narrative is wrongly assigned to the time of Jehoram, it is likely that 'Ben-Hadad' here refers to the successor of Hazael. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 78-79 provide a good summary in reaching the same conclusion. In 1 and 2 Kings we find בְּהַדָּד at 1 Kgs 15.18, 20; 20.3, 5, 9, 10, 17, 20, 26, 32, 33; 2 Kgs 6.24; 8.9; 13.3, 24, 25. Further on the identity question see Gotthard G. G. Reinhold, 'The Bir-Hadad Stele and the Biblical Kings of Aram,' *AUSS* 24 (1986) 115-26; A. J. Dearman and J. M. Miller, 'The Melqart Stele and the Ben Hadads of Damascus: Two Studies,' *PEQ* 115 (1983) 95-101.

<sup>10</sup> See especially the interchange between Lasine and Pyper in the articles previously cited.

Several recent studies examine the importance of צעק within the Hebrew Bible and in the Northern prophetic narratives in particular. S. Meier, for example, notes the frequent marking of direct discourse<sup>11</sup> by the ubiquitous ויאמר but culls ‘a small but unified group of texts’ which mark direct discourse in a ‘peculiar manner’ as compared with what is typical for the Hebrew Bible. These narratives have in common a verbal form of צעק which is used as a marker of direct discourse.<sup>12</sup> Meier finds this use eleven times in the Hebrew Bible. Of these he considers seven (Exod 5.15-20; 1 Kgs 20.39-42; 2 Kgs 2.12; 4.1-4, 40-41; 6.5-7, 26-31) relevant to his study since they preserve a pattern in which: (1) צעק marks the commencement of speech and, (2) with the exception of 2 Kgs 2.12, each is followed by further speech exchanges between characters which are introduced by ויאמר.<sup>13</sup> Meier claims that the coherence of the narratives is apparent since, at a form critical level, they are all part of the genre *legendum*, ‘which focuses on the power of the holy man.’<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> On this important subject see C. L. Miller, ‘Discourse Functions of Quotative Frames in Biblical Hebrew narrative,’ in W. R. Bodine (ed.), *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What it Is and What it Offers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 155-182; id., ‘Introducing Direct Discourse in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,’ in R. D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994) 199-241; S. A. Meier, *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible*, VTSup 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); G. Savran, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative*, Indiana Studies in Bible and Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> S. A. Meier, ‘A Ugaritic Convention in Biblical Dialogue,’ *UF* 21 (1989) 277-82 (277-78). Meier notes the other verbs (ענה, דבר, שאל, נגד) which would be available. See also C. L. Miller, ‘Introducing Direct Discourse,’ 210-12 for an extensive listing of such verbs. One may argue that individuals ‘crying out’ would naturally express themselves using צעק, but Meier (279) points to other examples of ‘cries for help’ in the Hebrew Bible where the verb and the pattern he observes are not used. See e.g., Gen 21.16; Exod 16.2-3; 17.3; Judg 15.8; 16.28; 1 Sam 1.10-11; 12.19. Especially relevant is 2 Sam 14.4 where the cry to the king is nearly identical to that of 2 Kgs 6.26. For a detailed study see R. N. Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 103 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Boyce claims that any differences between צעק and יעק are ‘purely orthographic’ (p. 8) although the former is preferred in the Pentateuch as well in cases of crying out to persons rather than the deity (8-9, n.5).

<sup>13</sup> Meier, ‘Convention,’ 278. In the remaining four instances the verb occurs either within the speech of another (Exod 5:8) or it introduces a speech where dialogue is already ‘in progress’ (Gen 27.34; Exod 17.4; Num 12.13). It is unclear why Meier excludes the latter two examples (Exod 17.4; Num 12.13) from his treatment. They do not so much display speech in progress as much as a change in dialogue participants since in each case Moses ‘cries out to YHWH.’ The bold font above notes the verse where the initial צעק is located.

<sup>14</sup> Meier, ‘Convention,’ 282.

initiation of dialogue with צעק followed by the 'resumptive' response is, for Meier, evidence of the persistence of old Canaanite conventions in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>15</sup> What is important for our purposes is the observation that only Exodus has a larger number of occurrences of the verb צעק (9x) than 2 Kgs (8x).<sup>16</sup> However, unlike Exodus, the instances in 2 Kings inhabit the confined textual space from chapters 2-8 (2.12; 3.21; 4.1, 40; 6.5, 26; 8.3, 5). Why is this so?

The first two instances are not relevant to our discussion.<sup>17</sup> In the remaining six verses the verb describes an appeal to individuals (rather than a more general 'cry' of distress). In the first three instances Elisha is called upon to assist those in need. Two of these occur among the sequence of tales in 2 Kgs 4; Elisha makes provision for an abundance of oil to the widow who 'cried out' to him (וַאֲשֶׁהָ...צָעְקָה אֶל-אֱלִישָׁע, 4.1) and heals the pot of stew for those who 'cried out' to the 'man of God' (4.40). In 2 Kgs 6.5 one of the sons of the prophets 'cried out' to Elisha concerning the lost axe head.

The final three examples involve appeals for assistance to the king of Israel (6.25; 8.3, 5). In 8.3, 5 the Shunammite returns to the narrative (and hopefully to her land and home) with her 'crying' to the king for the restoration of her land. As with the entreaty to Elisha in 4.1, 2 Kgs 6.26 also has a woman crying out to the king.<sup>18</sup> Thus three appeals to Elisha are matched by three appeals to the king. The appeals to Elisha concern pending financial crises (4.1-7; 6.1-7) or the provision of food in the midst of famine (4.38-41). Although occurring three times with respect to the king there are actually only two stories, the cannibal mothers (6.24-33) and the Shunammite's appeal (8.1-6).

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<sup>15</sup> Meier, 'Convention,' 282.

<sup>16</sup> The verb is found in Exod 5.8, 15; 8.8; 14.10, 15; 15.25, 17.4; 22.22, 26.

<sup>17</sup> See above discussion [earlier chapter] of Elisha's cry in 2 Kgs 2.12. In 2 Kgs 3.21 the verb (Niphal) is used as a call to arms (e.g., Judg 7. 23, 24; 10.17; 12.1).

<sup>18</sup> Boyce, *Cry to God*, 18-19. Boyce notes that the cry is usually brief however there are lengthier articulations of the problem (e.g., 2 Kgs 4.1).

Arguably each of these involve a plea for justice (משפט).<sup>19</sup> The ‘cry of the legally marginal to the king’ provides the social setting in which the cry plays ‘an integral role’.<sup>20</sup> The greater the gap in power between the king and the supplicant, ‘the greater the responsibility of the powerful to respond – especially if the *powerful* person is a *king* and the *powerless* person one who is *legally marginal*, e.g., widow, orphan, or resident alien.’<sup>21</sup> A king’s treatment of the legally marginal serves as a litmus test for the success or failure of the dynasty.<sup>22</sup> How the king of Israel fares in such a test is an ongoing concern of the Elisha stories. We will argue that the subplot of 2 Kgs 6.24-31, when read with a view to the wider narrative context, encourages a comparison of prophet with king.<sup>23</sup> Elisha accomplishes things which the king of Israel should but does not. Within 2 Kings persons cry out (צעק) only to Elisha and the king of Israel. This is in keeping with the only occurrence of צעק in 1 Kings (20.39) where, as in 2 Kgs 6.26, an individual appeals directly to a king of Israel as he is ‘passing by’.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Zipor, ‘Cannibal Women,’ 84 observes that the king is to render justice for his people (cf. 1 Sam 8.5ff). We will return to this concept below. See also Boyce, *Cry*, 27; Long, *2 Kings*, 92; Nelson, *Kings*, 188. Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:311 observes: ‘Das bedeutet: der König wird um Rechtshilfe anrufen.’ While recognising the ‘formal judicial language’ Whitlam believes that the material in 2 Kgs 6.24-31 and 2 Kgs 8.1-6 is too sketchy to provide solid evidence for the actual exercise of judicial authority in the northern kingdom. However, based on a study of 1 Kgs 20 and 21 he does conclude that there was little difference in the development of monarchical authority before and after the division of the kingdom. See K. Whitlam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSup 12 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979), 181-84.

<sup>20</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 26. In chapter 3 Boyce treats five narratives where this is so: 2 Sam 14.1-24; 2 Sam 19.25-31; 1 Kgs 20.35-43; 2 Kgs 6.24-31; 2 Kgs 8.1-6.

<sup>21</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 32-33. To support this claim regarding the social world of the ancient Near East he provides examples from ancient Near Eastern literature (*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 178, 149, 151) as well as the Hebrew Bible (Isa 1.23; Jer 22.3, 16; Ps 72.12; Prov 29.14. More recently see J. Day, ‘The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy,’ in J. Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 72-90 (86-87) citing *KTU*<sup>2</sup> 1.16.VI.43-50 where King Keret is chastised because he does not ‘judge the cause of the widow’ or ‘feed the orphan before your face (nor) the widow behind your back.’

<sup>23</sup> Zipor, ‘Cannibal Women,’ 93 claims that the reference to the ‘threshing floor’ and the ‘wine press’ by the king, recall the food miracles of 2 Kgs 4. If the argument set forth in our chapter is plausible, there should be numerous narrative details encouraging the comparison.

<sup>24</sup> Note the similarity of 1 Kgs 20.39 (וְהָיָה הַמֶּלֶךְ עֹבֵר וְהוּא צָעַק אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ) and 2 Kgs 6.26 (וְהָיָה מֶלֶךְ)

In the previous narrative (2 Kgs 6.8-23) Elisha's name is withheld until his identification as the 'prophet who is in Israel' (6.12; cf. 5.3). Along with this identification comes the increased usage of his name in 6.17-21 and the play on his name in 6.19 noted in the prior chapter. As with the previous story, in 2 Kgs 6.24ff., although Elisha has yet to be introduced as a character, there are hints of his importance both in the content of the plaintiff's cry and in the response of the monarch. The woman's cry, 'Help! my Lord King' (הושיעה אדני המלך) v. 26b)<sup>25</sup> is met with the reply,

אל-יושעך יהיה מאין אושיעך המן-הגורן או מן-התקב:

'If YHWH should not help you!<sup>26</sup> From where shall I help you? From the threshing floor or from the wine vat?' (2 Kgs 6.27)

(ישךאל עבר על-החמה ואשה צעקה אליו). The only occurrence of זעק in 1 or 2 Kings is found at 1 Kgs 22.32 as reported speech in Jehoshaphat's cry of distress. Meier, 'Convention,' 279 claims that זעק is never used to introduce direct discourse in the Pentateuch or Kings.

<sup>25</sup> The hifil imperative הושיעה *save, deliver* (with paragogic ה) from ישע is found also as a request to Joshua (Josh 10.6); the woman of Tekoa to king David (2 Sam 14.4); to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kgs 16.7); to YHWH (2 Kgs 19.19). Of particular interest is 2 Sam 14.4 where, as in 2 Kgs 6.26, the request comes to *the king*. There are numerous instances in the Psalms: 3.8; 6.5; 7.2; 12.2; 20.10; 22.22; 28.9; 60.7, etc., and several in the Prophets: Isa 37.20; Jer 2.27; 7.14; 31.7. Whitlam raises the possibility that the word may have been chosen to highlight with irony the lack of faith in YHWH (*Just King*, 183.)

<sup>26</sup> The present translation takes a rather standard position. GKC §109h considers אל-יושעך a jussive in a negative protasis of a conditional sentence and thus renders it, *if the Lord do not help thee*. Driver, *Tenses* §152(3) comments that the sense of the passage is 'far from certain' and takes it as a 'double jussive' in a hypothetical sentence. Gray, *Kings*, 519 likewise takes it as a conditional commenting that it is not unknown to have the protasis as a jussive so that אל 'is the natural negative before the jussive in the protasis.' Burney, *Notes*, 289 states: 'Difficult' but believes it is best taken as 'a case of the jussive used in the protasis of a hypothetical sentence.' There are alternatives. Burney provides one which goes against the accentuation and renders it as a deprecation (exclamatory negative): *No! Let YHWH save you*. Others taking this latter position include Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 385; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings* 80. T. Muraoka, *Words*, 124 states: 'The traditional interpretation has been to treat it as used absolutely against the accent, of which phenomenon at least six certain examples are adducible.' He eventually leaves it a toss up noting that in the examples given to support a deprecation – (Gen 19.18; Judg 19.23; 2 Sam 13.25; 2 Kgs 3.13 (cf. BHS note at 6.27); 4.16 [M. has 4.17]; Ruth 1.13) – אל is not followed by a verbal form as in 2 Kgs 6.27. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 72 n.27(a) translates '*Yahweh cannot save you, how much less can I?*' noting that the text is 'a more direct statement.' The deprecatory sense has less force since the examples cited are not strictly analogous to 6.27 where a verbal form follows the negative. Also this view ignores the strong connection forged by the maqqef. The most syntactically faithful option would treat it as negative jussive, but as a real negative wish rather than conditional, *Let not YHWH save you*. See, for example, Gen 18.30, 21.12, 31.35, 49.6; Exod 8.25, 16.29; Josh 7.3; 1 Sam 19.4, 20.3; 1 Kgs 8.57 (with an obj suffix as in 2 Kgs 6.27); 2 Kgs 18.29, 30. Especially relevant are Exod 20.19 – *let not God speak with us* and 2 Kgs 19.10 – *let not your god deceive you*. The problem with this option is that it is contextually

Both the woman and the king (twice) use a form of the verb ישע from which the prophet's name derives. From whence does salvation arise?<sup>27</sup>

The positive sense of the prophetic name (אל־ישע) not yet uttered in this narrative portion contrasts with the negative evaluation made by the king (אֶל־יִשְׁעֶךָ יְהוָה).<sup>28</sup> In approaching a king for a legal hearing one's posture and manner would mimic one's approach to the deity.<sup>29</sup> This king, however, provides a strong reminder of the differences between the deity's power and his own. YHWH has provided no aid for the woman so how, the king queries, is he supposed to assist (מֵאַיִן אִישִׁיֶּךָ); his resources (both grain and grape) are limited.<sup>30</sup> Ellul believes that in denying the ability to help the king is 'abdicated' as the true king of Israel.<sup>31</sup> This raises several questions that will be addressed in due course: Why is there a famine in the first place? Why is YHWH doing nothing about it? Why does Elisha not act now?

The siege, the great famine (רָעַב גָּדוֹל בְּשָׂמְרוֹן, 6.25), and a tale of mothers who have consumed at least one child may illustrate the curse for disobedience (Deut 28.47-57), but who's disobedience?<sup>32</sup> The lack of rain and the concomitant crisis of a severe or great famine in Samaria plays an important role in the northern prophetic narratives from the start (1 Kgs 17.1; 18.2 [וַיְהִרְעַב הַזֶּזֶק בְּשָׂמְרוֹן]; cf. 19.44-45). The

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problematic. The woman's plea is to the king and not YHWH. By this rendering the king's reference to YHWH seems to come from nowhere. Therefore, in following the standard position, context wins out over a strictly syntactical choice. I am grateful to M. Rogland, Leiden University, for his input on this verse.

<sup>27</sup> This appeal to the monarch is not unlike those used to appeal to God in a time of trouble. Now in a moment of great distress the king is turned to as a 'supreme force for deliverance.' This provides the king with some 'aura of divinity.' See Z. Ben-Barak, 'The Appeal to the King as the Highest Authority for Justice' in M. Augustin and K.-D. Schunk (eds.), *Wünschet, Jerusalem Frieden': Collected Communications to the XIIth Congress of the IOSOT, Jerusalem, 1986* (Frankfurt/Bern/New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 169-177 (174).

<sup>28</sup> Zipor, 'Cannibal Women,' 91.

<sup>29</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> גֶּרֶן, 'threshing floor' and יֶקֶב, 'wine press or vat' are a 'merism for the entire harvest' (NIDDATE 1:893). They are found together at Num 18.27, 30; Deut 15.14; 16.13; 2 Kgs 6.27; Hos 9.2; Joel 9.24 and can signify great abundance (Deut 15.14) or great want (Hos 9.2).

<sup>31</sup> J. Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 45.

<sup>32</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 189; Bergen, *Elisha*, 138.

monarch's dwindling resources in the midst of famine contrasts with a prophet who earlier provided during famine (4.38). The issue raised by the woman in 6.24-31 is never actually resolved by the king passing (עבר) along the wall (6.26, 30), while the prophet provides for both a son (4.16) and the child's healing (4.35-37) in consequence of his 'passing through' (עבר) Shunem (4.8, 9).

The use of עבר may not be an insignificant feature since within the book of Kings the call to render justice takes place while the king attends to other business.<sup>33</sup> Typically, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, one would expect the king to be 'sitting' (ישב) in judgment.<sup>34</sup> Given the lack of a formal court setting, the attitude of the supplicant, manifest in bodily posture and speech, determines whether or not the case will be heard.<sup>35</sup> However, the king of Israel, who is called upon to 'save' and 'judge' does neither and can only call for the head of the one whom he ironically designates אֱלִישָׁע בֶּן-שָׁפָט (v. 31).<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not surprising that immediately following the king's designation we find Elisha, both in action and company, pictured in terms more appropriate to a judging monarch – 'sitting' (ישב) and the elders 'sitting' with him.<sup>37</sup> Again, apart from Elisha, it is monarchs within Kings who are found in the presence of elders. Earlier in 1 Kgs 12.8, 13 Rehoboam forsakes their counsel; the king of Israel (Ahab) seeks their counsel (20.7, 8); the elders of

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<sup>33</sup> Parker, *Stories*, 19. Among the Elisha narratives, Parker treats in some detail 2 Kgs 3.4-27; 4.1-7; 6.24-7.20; 8.1-6.

<sup>34</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 34 compares 2 Kgs 6.24-31 and 1 Kgs 20.35-43 with the more typically expected 'seated' position of a king while in court: 'This *in medias res* nature of the marginal's hearing underlines the precarious nature of these people's legal rights even vis-a-vis [*sic*] the king, their supposed protector.' Boyce likewise notices that in 2 Kgs 8.1-6 the king is initially involved in other matters.

<sup>35</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Zipor, 'Cannibal Women,' 91. Moore, *God Saves*, 100 n.2 makes a similar point with respect to the judgment soon to befall the king's captain (7.17). The phrase is found elsewhere at 1 Kgs 19.16, 19; 2 Kgs 3.11. This interpretation is at odds with Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 386 who hold that the king is indignant because Elisha is 'idly' sitting.

<sup>37</sup> Certainly the case would be strengthened here if Elisha were sitting 'at the gate.' Bergen, *Elisha*, 140-41 mentions the trouble commentators have with the presence of the elders.

Naboth's city do Jezebel's bidding (21.8, 11); and Jehu interacts with elders (10.1, 5).

### Royal Threats and Moral Breakdown

As is now obvious, one of the challenges facing interpreters of this story and these narratives concerns the portrayal of the king and the prophet.<sup>38</sup> That is, how are the characters of king and prophet to be interpreted? Parker comments: 'In relation to the prophet, the king appears as a helpless and desperate man' frustrated by the inactivity of YHWH and his prophet.<sup>39</sup> The king would fare well in an academic guild which likewise expresses consternation at the inactivity of God and prophet.<sup>40</sup> Many commentators argue that the narrative portrayal of the king is negative. Recently however, the unnamed king has been given 'an uncharacteristically sympathetic' reading by W. Bergen.<sup>41</sup> Taking a moderating position, Rofé observes that the king is painted in colours both righteous and cautious on the one hand, and as a 'son of a murderer' willing to remove the head of the prophet on the other.<sup>42</sup> Below we shall argue for a view of the king that, while basically negative, attempts to hold positive features in tension. In spite of the recent redemptive attempts, we maintain that the overall narrative portrayal of the king is negative for several reasons.

Having heard the cry of woman and made his initial, somewhat despairing response, the king turns his attention to the supplicant with a question (v. 28).<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 41 notes those commentators for whom the king's actions are sincere and those who question his faith. It may be that differences of opinion reflect the redactional changes evident in the story such that an earlier version (6.24-26, 28-30; 7.3-16) portrayed the king more sympathetically than a later prophetic revision (6.27, 31-7.1, 16b) and a later redactional gloss (7.2, 17-20). Several commentators follow the proposal of Schmitt, *Elisa*, 37-41. See e.g., Parker, *Stories*, 121; Jones, *Kings*, 2:429-430; Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:309.

<sup>39</sup> Parker, *Stories*, 120.

<sup>40</sup> Lanner, 'Cannibal Mothers,' 112.

<sup>41</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 140. He notes that only Lasine 'is willing to admit the possibility that the story may challenge the usual pro-prophetic stance of Genesis-2 Kings.' See Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 38 n.1; 47.

<sup>42</sup> Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> According to Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:311 verse 27 displays evidence of an addition: the woman requests a legal decision in verse 26, but the king responds as if she has made a request for food. With

euphony of the syntagm produced by the inversion of the first two consonants of the subject and the interrogative (הַמֶּלֶךְ מִהֵן) are part of a larger rhetorical strategy. While the words certainly reflect the stock reply of a monarch to an appeal for help<sup>44</sup> the juxtaposition of these words within the present context opens the possibility that perhaps it is the king who is the problem.<sup>45</sup> We shall return to a discussion of this phrase below.

Secondly, the return to a Judges-like world argued for in our prior treatment of 2 Kgs 6.1-23 persists in the present story. Lasine regards the similarity between the Levite's lack of comprehension and the callousness he displays with respect to his concubine (Judg 19) on the one hand, and the mother in relation to her child in 2 Kgs 6.24ff. on the other, as narrative portrayals of a social order turned on its head.<sup>46</sup> However, Pyper rightly calls into question this portrayal of a thorough-going anarchy. The woman comes to the king assuming that she can appeal to him for justice which merely underlines the notion that she believes some semblance of social justice remains: 'mothers may kill their children, but they should keep their promises.'<sup>47</sup> In Judges 19 the cause of social collapse is strongly hinted at in the repeated refrain that Israel had no king (17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25). In the Elisha narratives the cause is not always so obvious. Even if social collapse is illustrated in 2 Kgs 6.24ff., it is not somehow confined to this story alone. Both 1 and 2 Kings are ostensibly a story of identity (loss and formation?) in the midst of increasing social entropy.<sup>48</sup> What are the Elisha narratives displaying for us if they portray a prophet

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verse 27 removed, the request for a legal decision is met with the more appropriate invitation in verse 28. The present interpretation makes a more explicit connection between verse 28 and 6.31-7.2 which verses Würthwein also sees as part of a later addition.

<sup>44</sup> Boyce, *Cry*, 38. Having heard and recognised the cry of the marginal the king applies his attention to the situation. See 2 Sam 14.5; 1 Kgs 1.16; Est 5.3

<sup>45</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 38-39. 'The complainant's obliviousness to the appalling nature of her crime is also an indicator of the inverted world *topos*' (p. 38).

<sup>47</sup> Pyper, 'Wisdom of Solomon,' 26.

<sup>48</sup> McConville, 'Narrative and Meaning,' 43. On the issue of identity formation and history writing in Kings see Linville, *Israel*, 74-111.

caring for the widow and the orphan, petitioned by language typical of address to a king, and sitting as the son of Shaphat 'in court' with the elders, all kingly characterisations. From such a perspective the Elisha narratives are not so inimical to the books' wider concerns. Lasine nicely highlights several ancient Near Eastern texts describing cannibalism more generally as well as prophetic biblical texts which specifically explore 'cannibalism' among the leaders of Israel (Ezek 34.1-10; Mic 3.1-3; Zech 11.8-9).<sup>49</sup> However, in detailing this breakdown of social relations he never questions whether the narrative may, in fact, portray the Omrides as part of the problem. If the king is the embodiment of his people<sup>50</sup> and the people are eating their young, what does that say about kingship generally and this king in particular? Reinhartz concurs: 'The sequence and specific narrative contexts of these stories illustrate the narrator's views concerning the progressive deterioration of the monarchy and the material and moral situation of the people.'<sup>51</sup>

Third, the king calls for the immediate removal of Elisha's head. The capture, control and, at times, killing of the prophetic presence is a feature not unusual within the larger contextual framework of the northern prophetic narratives (1 Kgs 18.4, 10; 19.2; 2 Kgs 1.9; 2 Kgs 6.8-23). When viewed as part of the present story, it is too difficult to cast the oath of 2 Kgs 6.31 in a positive light. Lasine makes the attempt, observing the similar rending of the king's garments in 2 Kgs 5.7 and 6.30. Elisha has, in previous confrontations with the king, led him to believe that prophetic power could resolve problems ('Let him come to me...', 5.8). Therefore, according to Lasine, when the king curses Elisha in 6.31 it is because he is merely acting upon past experience; Elisha *could* help but has not. This urgent response of the king

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<sup>49</sup> Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 523 commenting on the king's sackcloth in verse 30 writes: 'Here, as in few instances in the Old Testament outside the liturgy of the Psalms, the status of the king as the embodiment of the people is graphically illustrated.' See also Jones, *Kings*, 2:433; Nelson, *Kings*, 189.

<sup>51</sup> A. Reinhartz, 'Why Ask My Name?' *Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110. Recently Lanner, 'Cannibal Mothers,' 113 vehemently questions Lasine's interpretation. Her article is a call to consider seriously the woman's plight.

rather than the indifference of the prophet, makes him more like Moses and Job ‘than his father Ahab.’<sup>52</sup> Before agreeing or disagreeing with this characterisation of the king, there are several significant narrative analogies within the stories of 1 Kgs 18-21 that must be examined. These analogies, along with earlier statements made by both Elisha and the king, must be considered in any evaluation of the king’s character. One such analogy is the similarity of the formulaic oath of the king in 2 Kgs 6.31 and one uttered previously by Jezebel with respect to Elijah (1 Kgs 19.2)<sup>53</sup>

כֹּה־יַעֲשֶׂה־לִּי אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסֵף אִם־יַעֲמֹד רֹאשׁ אֵלִישָׁע בֶּן־שַׁפְטָן עָלָיו הַיּוֹם  
 ‘Thus may god do to me and even more if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stands upon him today.’ (2 Kgs 6.31)

כֹּה־יַעֲשׂוּן אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסֵפוּן כִּי־כִעֵת מָחָר אֲשִׁים אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ כְּנַפֵּשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֵם:  
 ‘Thus may the gods do and even more (if) by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like the life of one of them.’ (1 Kgs 19.2).

The narrative movement of 1 Kgs 18/19 when compared and contrasted with 2 Kgs 6.8-23/6.24-7.20 also presents a number of interesting similarities. In each case prophetic confrontation and victory are followed by monarchic oath and action, resulting in a display of prophetic fear. Like Elijah’s confrontation with the Baal prophets in 1 Kgs 18, 2 Kgs 6.8-23 presents a high point of Elisha’s prophetic confrontation with the enemies of YHWH.<sup>54</sup> While Jezebel makes her oath because of Elijah’s prior slaughter of the prophets (1 Kgs 19.1), the text of 2 Kgs 6.31 provides no explicit motivation for the royal censure of Elisha. The vague ‘some time later’ in 2 Kgs 6.24, provides only minor narrative glue with which to bind the blinding of the Arameans and the complex narrative that follows. If the reader wants a reason for the

<sup>52</sup> Lasine, ‘Jehoram,’ 43-44. Lasine also argues that the king ‘acts as surrogate’ for the reader (p. 48).

<sup>53</sup> Provan, *Kings*, 201. Occurrences of כֹּה־יַעֲשֶׂה as an oath appealing to god(s) are found with one exception (Ruth 1.17) in Samuel and Kings so J-M §165a(1): 1 Sam 3.17; **14.44**; 20.13; **25.22**; 2 Sam 3.9, 35; 19.14. In Kings we find it at 1 Kgs 2.23; 19.2 (Jezebel); 20.10 (Ben-Hadad); 2 Kgs **6.31**. In 1 Kgs **19.2**; **20.10** we find plural verbs and thus ‘*may the gods*’...*may they add*’). See Burney, *Notes*, 21 for a lengthy discussion under 1 Kgs **2.23**. J-M also notes that the verbal forms are indicative ‘despite the optative sense.’ Those references having to do with death or destruction are put in bold relief. See also Revell, *Designation*, 202-03 for a discussion of this oath.

<sup>54</sup> This conclusion, with respect to the Elisha narratives, is also made by Bergen, *Elisha*, 127.

king's anger, for example because of his release of the Arameans in 6.23, he or she must supply it.<sup>55</sup> It does not follow, however, that there are no textual indicators by which to measure the king's anger.

What is certain is that both Jezebel and later the king of Israel make declarations calling for the immediate destruction of the prophets. Associated with or following from these oaths, each monarch 'sends a messenger' (1 Kgs 19.2; 2 Kgs 6.32). Likewise within the narrative we find Elijah hiding in a cave and Elisha shut up in his house, soon after the delivery of the monarch's oath. Thus the prophets are portrayed as experiencing some uncertainty with respect to the actions of royalty. The boldness of Elijah on Mt. Carmel and Elisha's 'Fear not' (6.16) recede in the face of genuine royal threat. In his fear Elijah complains that he is the only one left, while Elisha is found with the elders.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the deliverance of the word of YHWH in 2 Kgs 7.1 mocks Jezebel's prior threat. Both YHWH and Jezebel promise that their word will be fulfilled *כָּעֵת מִקָּר*. The fulfilment of the oaths of the Omride monarchs however, is never actualised for either prophet: Elijah is not made like one of the prophets of Baal and Elisha keeps his head, but the word of YHWH is shown to be effective (2 Kgs 7.18). The fulfilment of YHWH's word, pedantic in presentation with its conscious repetition (cf. 7.1-2; 7.16b-20) contrasts with the lack of fulfilment of the words of the king of Israel and Jezebel before him.

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<sup>55</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 139 attends to the various options: Gray, *Kings* 523 (the king expects riots and seeks to divert attention from himself to Elisha); Jones, *Kings*, 2:433-34 (though there have been numerous proposals the text is silent, evidence perhaps that the section is a later addition); Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 80 (Elisha is held indirectly responsible because of his prior release of the Arameans in 6.23).

<sup>56</sup> We would argue that Elisha is expressing some fear for several reasons. First, compared with the previous story in which he single-handedly confronted an entire army, it seems odd to find him behind closed doors. Secondly, Elisha requests that the door be held fast because he knows that the king has sent to remove his head. For a discussion of the 'humanization' of these two prophets see K. R. R. Gros Louis, 'Elijah and Elisha,' in K. R. R. Gros Louis, (ed.), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) 177-90 (184-90). Gros Louis sees Elisha as the less human and more confident of the two, but neglects to mention the scene of Elisha in his house and the tears he sheds in 2 Kgs 8.12.

## The Messenger and the Murderer's Son

Finally we return to the syntagm, מִהֶמְלֵךְ מִהֶמְלֵךְ, to which prior allusion was made. Does this provide further textual support for the assertion that the king is the problem? The answer to this question comes by way of a proposal regarding the difficult stretch of text in 6.32-33. There are several related difficulties associated with these verses. First, the text is ambiguous with respect to the subject of וַיִּשְׁלַח (6.32b). To put it another way, who exactly is 'sending'? Is it Elisha or is it the king?<sup>57</sup> Second, should we read מִהֶמְלֵךְ for מִהֶמְלֵךְ in verse 33 as many commentators suggest, since the words only make sense in the mouth of the king? The text itself seems to require the emendation.<sup>58</sup> Montgomery and Gehman assert: 'The one necessary correction is to read in v.<sup>33</sup> *the king* (*melek* in place of *mal'ak*, "messenger").' To put this another way we may ask who is 'arriving'? This, however, raises the question of the relationship between the king and his messenger. One way through this conundrum may be to argue that the words of the king's messenger are elsewhere heard as equal to the words of the king (2 Kgs 18.19ff). However, there may be another explanation.

Cogan and Tadmor note how surprising it is to both the reader and to Elisha to see the king appear at his door, since both reader and prophet are expecting the henchman initially to arrive.<sup>59</sup> While this may be true, the appearance of 'the messenger' is really no less surprising than the ostensible appearance of 'the king' whose words are heard only in the voice of the messenger (v. 33b). He never actually arrives on stage since it is only the sound/voice (קול) of his feet which, according to the prophet, will follow the messenger's arrival.<sup>60</sup> The narrative switch from the more

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<sup>57</sup> G<sup>L</sup> makes this explicit by adding ὁ βασιλεύς, which is not found in the Targum Jonathan or the Peshitta.

<sup>58</sup> See BHS note at 6.33; Benzinger, *Könige*, 143; R. Kittel, *Könige*, 216; Burney, *Notes*, 290; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 386; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 80. Even this is questionable since the prophet seems to hear 'the sound of his master's feet after him.'

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to A. G. Auld for pointing out the importance of קול here.

generic *שׂא* to the more specific *מלאך*, seems odd. The need of commentators to read *המלך* for *המלאך* reveals the success of a rhetorical strategy at work here. The exposition of this strategy requires a brief exploration of the presence of comic and even satirical elements in 2 Kgs 6.24-7.20 noted by a number of interpreters. LaBarbera, for example, notes that the story ‘draws on traditional material rich in irony, puns, and humor, to create a biting social commentary.’<sup>61</sup> Lasine, whose study is in part a refutation of LaBarbera’s contention that the story is a peasant-inspired satire on the ruling class, still observes comic elements within the story. Specifically he mentions the ‘grotesque humor’ conveying a sense of a world ‘in which social relations have totally broken down.’<sup>62</sup> In arguing for the unity of the story Rofé claims: ‘While displaying a broad epic perspective, it integrates its folkloristic elements into a single unit, in which humor, though macabre, is the dominant vein.’<sup>63</sup>

A recent study by Z. Weisman provides some support to the notion that 2 Kgs 6.24-7.20 contains elements of political satire.<sup>64</sup> Among his summary comments he lists several germane to the narrative under discussion and which may be more comprehensively applicable to the Elisha narratives. Weisman notes, for example, that satire is often anonymous, covering the identity of the object of criticism preferring to treat that object by ‘nicknames, metaphors, allegory and even parody that allude to that object. The use of camouflage is applied either out of personal precaution or as an artistic technique.’<sup>65</sup> Another feature of satire relevant to our discussion concerns the use of grotesque, paradoxical, or absurd elements to heighten criticism. Here the satirist manipulates literary and linguistic devices ‘such as puns,

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<sup>61</sup> LaBarbera, ‘Man of War,’ 651. See also Nelson, *Kings*, 187; Long, *2 Kings*, 91; Pyper, ‘Wisdom of Solomon,’ 27-28.

<sup>62</sup> Lasine, ‘Jehoram,’ 39. Lasine also mentions comical aspects of the story on pages 33, 39 n.2.

<sup>63</sup> Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> Z. Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, SBLSS 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Weisman, *Satire*, 8.

double entendres, plays of sounds (paronomasia, alliteration and assonance) for his witty criticism.<sup>66</sup>

The covering of identity, the use of the grotesque, and the manipulation of linguistic elements are present in the story under discussion. This does not justify the conclusion that 2 Kgs 6.24-7.20 is political satire, nor is it our intention to claim so. However, in consideration of the above observations and suggestions it may explain some of the narrative features present. In keeping with the camouflaging of identity mentioned by Weisman, we propose that the figure of king and messenger are conflated. Strictly speaking the king never arrives in 6.32-7.2, but is merely a disembodied character for whom the messenger speaks in 6.33b. Thus the condemnation of the king, explicit in his question of 6.33b, is put into the mouth of a character who immediately fades from view. After he comes down to Elisha (הַמֶּלֶךְ יָרַד אֵלָיו, 6.33) he vanishes from the narrative only later to be replaced by the king in similar language (בְּרִדַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו, 7.17).<sup>67</sup> As noted above, it is strange that Elisha should mention the ‘sound of his feet’ since it is finally only the sound of the king’s voice which we hear. Nelson has made a similar observation: ‘Does the king ever arrive? In chapter 7, verse 17 will make it clear that he does, but the messenger seems to telescope into the king, then the captain pops up out of nowhere.’<sup>68</sup> The transposing of מֶלֶךְ for מֶלֶךְ and the king’s prior question to the woman (הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהֶ-לֵךְ) suggest the final step of keeping one eye focused on מֵהֶ-לֵךְ while actually reading מֶלֶךְ.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Weisman, *Satire*, 8. See most recently the examples in N. Levine, ‘Twice as Much,’ 25-46.

<sup>67</sup> The last time Elisha was confronted by a hostile group they also came down (יָרַד) to him (6.18).

<sup>68</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 189. This observation with respect to the king’s character been made by others approaching the text from an historical perspective. One of the goals J. Strange, ‘Joram, King of Israel and Judah,’ *VT* 25 (1975) 191-201 sets for himself is ‘to explain the existence of a “ghost –Joram” in Israel’ (192). He attempts to provide an historical explanation for the existence of two Jorams (Jehorams), one in Judah and one in Israel since their purported reigns overlap.

<sup>69</sup> It is of course the similarity of מֶלֶךְ and מֶלֶךְ which encourages commentators to propose an emendation in 6.33. To my knowledge no commentator has noted the similarity of מֶלֶךְ and מֵהֶ-לֵךְ.

And Elisha was sitting in his house and the elders were sitting with him. And he sent a man from his presence. Before<sup>70</sup> **what's-your-trouble** came to him he said to the elders, 'Have you seen that this son of the murderer sent to remove my head?'<sup>71</sup> Look when **what's-your-trouble** arrives, shut the door and squeeze him in the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet after him. He was still speaking with them<sup>72</sup> when suddenly **what's-your-trouble** came down to him. And he said, 'Look, this is the disaster from YHWH.'<sup>73</sup> How can I keep waiting for YHWH any longer?'

This explanation accounts for the king's question to the woman, the confusing relationship between מִלְאָךְ and מִלְאָךְ as well as the literary and linguistic connections between these two words and מִה־לֵּךְ. This is not a proposal to emend מִלְאָךְ to מִה־לֵּךְ.<sup>74</sup> Neither is this a suggestion that the king's question is somehow unexpected or odd given the social context.<sup>75</sup> Instead, given the comic nature already noted, we are arguing that this paronomasia is an implied critique of the king.

This submerged critique is raised to the surface by the bolder, even more negative assessment of the king of Israel as a בְּנֵי־הַמְרִצָּח by Elisha (*piel* participle).<sup>76</sup> The phrase is typical of Oriental usage and refers generally to a class of persons, i.e., to the king as a murderer in intent rather than to his lineage. Because of this, many

<sup>70</sup> The division of this sentence into two is not completely satisfactory. Readers naturally interpret Elisha as the subject of וישלח unless or until contextual issues urge otherwise. Initially it is preferable to read: 'And he [Elisha] sent a man from his presence before the messenger came to him.' However, the fact that later 'this murderer sends' (שלח) forces a readjustment of the interpreter's prior judgment. An examination of בטרם is of little help. It is found at Gen 27.4, 33; 37.18; 41.50; 45.28; Exod 1.19; Lev 14.36; Deut 31.21; Judg 14.18; Ruth 3.14 (Qere), 1 Sam 2.15; 9.13, 2 Kgs 2.9; 6.32, Job 10.21, Ps 39.14; 58.10; 90.2; Prov 8.25; 18.13; 30.7, Isa 7.16; 8.4; 17.14; 28.4; 42.9; 48.5; 66.7 (2x), Jer 1.5 (2x); 13.16 (2x); 38.10; 47.1, Ezek 16.57; Zeph 2.2 (3x). In most cases within narrative it cannot stand at the head of a sentence (but see Gen 37.18, 41.50, Exod 1.19). It is asyndetic in all cases except Gen 37.18; Jer 1.5 (2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence); Jer 13.16 (2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence). Overall, contextual matters determine the linguistic decisions here.

<sup>71</sup> It is odd that Elisha should ask this question before the messenger arrives. How could the elders have seen the messenger before he arrived. Is this an example of prophetic insight? Were the elders present when the king uttered his oath?

<sup>72</sup> Driver, *Tenses* §169 in his discussion of circumstantial clauses notes the similar construction in Gen 29.9 ורחל עמם ורחל עמם and translates: 'He was still speaking, *when* Rachel entered in...'

<sup>73</sup> Other 'evils' from YHWH (מֵאֵת יְהוָה) include fire (Gen 19.24; Num 16.35); wind (Num 11.31); hardened hearts (Josh 11.20); an evil spirit (1 Sam 16.14).

<sup>74</sup> Also there is no versional support for the proposed emendation from מִלְאָךְ to מִה־לֵּךְ.

<sup>75</sup> Boyce notes that within the present social context the king's response is perfectly reasonable and indicates that he has correctly heard the cry of the marginal 'as cry for a legal hearing' (*Cry to God*, 38).

<sup>76</sup> The expected *dagesh forte* in the first consonant of הַמְרִצָּח is lacking. This is a variation for words beginning with מ (see WOC §13.3d).

commentators assert that it does not imply any reference to Ahab.<sup>77</sup> But why must this be phrased as an either/or proposition?<sup>78</sup> Can it not bear reference to the king of Israel in 2 Kgs 6.32, both as one who commits murder frequently, and as the son of Ahab/Jezebel?<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere the *piel* participle is used in Isaiah 1.21 and the thematic and lexical ties are worth noting. Isaiah claims that the city (Zion?) was once full of justice (משפט), but now murderers (מרצחים). By comparison, in 2 Kgs 6.31-32, the home of Elisha, containing the בן-שפט is threatened by the king (בן-המרצה). The evaluative designations for king and prophet are each placed in the mouth of the other character.

The similarity of Jezebel's curse against Elijah, the fact that the only other occurrence of רצה in Samuel/Kings is found in 1 Kgs 21.19 (at just that point where Elijah utters his oracle against Ahab for the seizure of Naboth's vineyard), the fulfilment of that oracle looming on the narrative horizon (2 Kgs 9.7, 26), and the 'son of' designations uttered by the king and the prophet, are all points which support a reading that links the unnamed king with the Omrides. Far from being a Moses or

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<sup>77</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 386; Jones, *Kings*, 2:434; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 80; Wiseman, *Kings*, 211.

<sup>78</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 80. While Hobbs does state it as an either/or proposition, he is among those who see in בן-המרצה a possible reference to Ahab. See also Barnes, *Kings*, 213; Provan, *Kings*, 200-01. With respect to morphology, according to Even-Shoshan, p. 1091 the *piel* form is found at 2 Kgs 6.32; Isa 1.21; Hos 6.9; Ps 94.6; Ps 62.4. This latter instance is, however, a *pual* form. The Ben Naphtali tradition supports reading a *piel* at Ps 62.4. See *BDB*: 953-54.

<sup>79</sup> This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the problems associated with the *qal* and *piel* verbal stems given that the definition of the *piel* in relation to other stems remains a point of 'major challenge' to Semitic grammarians. (J-M §52d). However, we note that the only other occurrence of the *piel* participle of רצה is the plural form located at Isa 1.21 (מרצחים). L. G. Rignell, 'Isaiah Chapter 1. Some Exegetical Remarks with Special Reference to the Relationship between the Text and the Book of Deuteronomy,' *ST* 11 (1958) 140-59 (153-54), notes that the *qal* ('kill') of this verb refers to unintentional homicide while the *piel* may express the more emphatic 'murder' or the iterative sense 'kill in mass'. *HALOT* 3:1283 gloss the plural participle 'to commit murder frequently.' According to WOC §24.5c, the *piel* and especially its participial form may indicate habitual or professional activity. WOC here rely on the work of E. Jenni, *Das hebräische Pi<sup>c</sup>el: Syntaktisch-semasiologische Untersuchung einer Verbalform im Alten Testament* (Zurich: EVZ, 1968), 156-64. The *qal* participle was certainly available in reference to the 'manslayer' (cf. Num 35, Deut 19, Josh 20, 21). It is likely that the *piel* participle in 2 Kgs 6.32 has the nuance of 'one who is characterised by frequent killing.'

Job (so Lasine) the unnamed king is being aligned, somewhat carefully, with Ahab and Jezebel.

### Which Disaster from YHWH?

Before moving on to Elisha's oracle and the captain's statement in 7.1-2, the presumed disparity between king's garb in 6.30, his promise to kill Elisha, and the statement/question spoken by the messenger/king in 6.33b must be considered. Jehoram on the wall visible to all the people, tearing his clothes and revealing the underlying sackcloth, presents a problem for characterising the king in a negative light. Why is he presented in this fashion? Explanations of the presence of sackcloth range from impugning the king for false piety, to seeing his actions as genuine repentance and sympathy for his people. Within this latter category the disparity between the king's behaviour and his initially uttered words are viewed as evidence for a later revision since 6.30 (display of sackcloth) is clearly at odds with 6.31-7.1 which follows. Some find it odd that a politician would act in such a contradictory manner, showing signs of repentance only to call immediately for the prophet's head.<sup>80</sup> However the words of the king and an eye to broader contextual characterisations actually provide further support that the text presents a genetic link between this king and Ahab/Jezebel.

First there is the exclamation of the messenger/king (וַיֹּאמֶר הַמַּלְאָכִים הַזֵּאת הַרְשָׁה מֵאֵת יְהוָה) (6.33b). How should this ambiguous statement be rendered?<sup>81</sup> A number of the English versions as well as commentators render the phrase adjectivally: 'This

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<sup>80</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 646; Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 22-23 understand the sackcloth negatively. Neutral or positive assessments are found in Gray, *Kings*, 523; Robinson, *Kings*, 2:66; Jones, *Kings*, 2:433; Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 40-41; Wiseman, *Kings*, 211; Provan, *Kings*, 200.

<sup>81</sup> We have addressed above the question of the subject of this utterance. The ambiguity mentioned here relates to the sense and reference of the statement rather than to whom is the speaking subject. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 81 resolves the problem by asserting that Elisha is the subject of the verb וַיֹּאמֶר. This is incorrect given the prior reference to the messenger and the explicit subject change made in 7.1. Bergen, *Elisha*, 142 seriously misreads Hobbs on this point.

trouble/disaster is from YHWH....<sup>82</sup> Although J-M §143i lists 2 Kgs 6.33 among the ‘very rare cases’ of an adjectival use of **זה** before the noun, there is no compelling evidence for reading the phrase in this fashion.<sup>83</sup> There are other places in Kings where the more usual **הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת** occurs (1 Kgs 9.9). In 6.33 it is better rendered: ‘Look, this is *the* disaster from YHWH.’<sup>84</sup>

Of course this raises several other questions. What is ‘this’ and what is the ‘disaster’ or ‘trouble’? Is it the famine? Is it the cannibalism previously highlighted? Perhaps the ‘trouble’ is Elisha himself? The latter cannot be immediately excluded given Ahab’s prior designation of Elijah as the ‘troubler’ (**עֹבֵר**) of Israel (1 Kgs 18.17). At a minimum we can say that the king’s oath presupposes that Elisha was somehow culpable for the present crisis.<sup>85</sup> Whether the king’s actions and dress arise from noble or ignoble purposes it is difficult to ascertain. From the perspective of the present story it is certain that a sack-clothed king calls for a prophet’s head. Lasine asserts that the king’s actions reveal a still-intact sense of social responsibility.<sup>86</sup> This may be so. Nevertheless, it is an odd sense of social responsibility that invokes God’s authority in order to destroy God’s prophet.<sup>87</sup>

One solution to these questions may be best summarised under the rubric ‘like father/mother, like son.’ Above it was noted that besides 2 Kgs 6.32 the only other occurrence of **רִצָּח** in Samuel-Kings is found at 1 Kgs 21.19 where Elijah delivers his

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<sup>82</sup> NIV; NRSV; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 71; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 76; Wiseman, *Kings*, 211.

<sup>83</sup> The examples provided by J-M §143i are before proper names (Exod 32.1; 1 Sam 21.12; Judg 5:5/Ps 68.9); may be taken as possessives (Cant 7.8; Ezra 3.12); or may actually be read as evidencing a predicative use (Isa 23.13; Ps 104.25; Ps 118.20). One of the examples exhibits an anarthrous noun (Ps 34.7). Of the examples adduced only 1 Kgs 14.14 requires an adjectival reading (cf. Judg 4.14; Ps 118.24). J-M also cite Gen 2.23 as a ‘possible’ case as well as Ps 49.14 although it is unclear how this latter example supports the case. Burney, *Notes*, 190 cites Josh 9.12 which J-M §143i, n.1 appear to see as an exception.

<sup>84</sup> Note for example the rendering of Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:308: ‘dies ist das Unheil von Jahwe.’

<sup>85</sup> Wiseman, *Kings*, 211. Auld, *Kings*, 175. Ahab likewise sought Elijah in a setting of famine 1 Kgs 18.10.

<sup>86</sup> Lasine, ‘Jehoram,’ 40.

<sup>87</sup> A point made by Ellul, *Politics of God*, 47 and cited by Moore, *God Saves*, 97 n.2. Ellul believes that the attempt to kill Elisha is really a way of getting at God (p.46).

guilty verdict to Ahab. A form of the verb is therefore placed in the mouths of Elijah and Elisha with application to Ahab and Jehoram respectively. In response to Ahab's actions YHWH through Elijah promises to bring disaster (רעה) upon Ahab, cutting off all his male descendants (1 Kgs 21.21). Ahab responds to Elijah's words by tearing his clothes and donning sackcloth (1 Kgs 21.27). Jehoram likewise tears his clothes to reveal the sackcloth already in place. While the Judean kings Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19.1) and Josiah (2 Kgs 22.11) each tear their clothes and Hezekiah, like Ahab, puts on sackcloth, it is only Ahab and Jehoram who are described as having the sackcloth על-בשרו (1 Kgs 21.27; 2 Kgs 6.30).<sup>88</sup> YHWH responds favourably to Ahab's repentance and delays his judgment: He will not bring the disaster (הרעה) in Ahab's day but will bring it (הרעה) in the days of his son (1 Kgs 21.29). Although prevalent throughout the Hebrew Bible, הרעה is found from 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13 only at 1 Kgs 21.29 and 2 Kgs 6.33. The use of the definite article in 1 Kgs 21.29 is anaphoric with respect to the occurrence of רעה mentioned in verse 21. Likewise *the disaster* from YHWH in 2 Kgs 6.33 points back to the prior use in 1 Kgs 21.29: *this is that disaster*. The king of Israel in 2 Kgs 6.24ff., aware of the prior judgment issued against his father's house, anxiously looks over his shoulder at his impending doom.<sup>89</sup>

Nor is this the first time that the king has wondered whether YHWH's judgment was near at hand. In 2 Kgs 3.10, 13 he is certain that YHWH has brought the three kings together to hand them over to Moab. In that story the previous naming of 'Elisha son of Shaphat' is also found in a context which connects Jehoram with Ahab and Jezebel as Elisha tells him to go 'to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother' (2 Kgs 3.11-13).

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<sup>88</sup> See also 2 Kgs 5.8 where the king of Israel tears his garments in response to a perceived Aramean threat. In both 2 Kgs 5 and 2 Kgs 6 a figure (Naaman, the woman) turns to the king of Israel for help and in each case he cannot or does not help (Ellul, *Politics of God*, 52).

<sup>89</sup> We do not wish to push the grammatical point too far but it is interesting that the participle is also found with the definite article. Does המרצח have the sense of a proper name? (WOC §13.6a). In other words, it is tempting to press the definite article into use in the phrase בן-המרצח הזה and read *this son of the murderer*.

Underlying and supporting all of this is a ponderous sense of inevitability that threads its way through Kings. Jehoram may tear his clothes like Ahab his father, and he may even place sackcloth underneath those clothes (*upon his flesh*) and yet it is to no avail: YHWH is certain to bring the promised disaster not upon Ahab but upon his son. This precedent for the northern kingdom is found in Judah as well. In spite of Josiah's reforms, YHWH's anger was not averted (cf. 2 Kgs 23.25-26). The overall narrative portrayal signals the chief reason why the story presents Jehoram rending his garments and wearing sackcloth next to his body in one verse only to be followed immediately by the oath to remove Elisha's head (2 Kgs 6.30-31). The attentive reader hereby gains a portrayal of Jehoram recalling both Ahab and Jezebel. It is unclear whether the king views the particulars of famine, cannibalism, prophet or some combination as the 'disaster' that has come upon him. In any event he interprets his present circumstances as evidence of a previously rendered judgment.

This leads naturally to the despair of the monarch climaxing in his question: 'How shall I keep waiting for YHWH any longer?' (מָה־אוֹחִיל לַיהוָה עוֹד).<sup>90</sup> The king sees no reason to hope further in the very one he considers responsible for the disaster. When viewed as the present fulfilment of a past judgment his present situation is hopeless: there is no help on the horizon and waiting for YHWH is an impossibility.<sup>91</sup> In effect the king says, 'Look Elisha, I've been waiting for some disaster to befall me and, given the present lack of assistance, the current circumstances fit the bill.' Strictly

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<sup>90</sup> The present translation attempts to get at the durative nature of verb. Many of the durative examples provided in J-M §113d similarly occur with מָה + *yiqtol* forms. The verb יָחַל is infrequent in the Former Prophets (Judg 3.25; 1 Sam 10.8; 13.8; 2 Kgs 6.33). The great majority of instances are found in the Writings particularly the Psalms, Job and Lamentations. *TLOT* 2:542 cites Lam 3.18 (noun) along with 2 Kgs 6.33 stating: 'The significance of waiting on God is demonstrated in the lament in which the abandonment of waiting signifies the low point....' *TDOT* 6:55 concurs citing a number of passages in which a verb of hope/waiting is found in the context of the particle מָה (Ps 39.8; Job 6.11; 2 Kgs 6.33). The writers/editors of Targum Jonathan soften the king's hopelessness by having him ask whether to continue praying: מָה אֲצַלִּי קִדְמֵי יְיָ עוֹד ('What more shall I pray before the Lord?'). See Harrington and Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan*, 276, n.33.

<sup>91</sup> WOC §18.3f notes that מָה in exclamatory questions may involve a verb (cf. 2 Kgs 4.43). *BDB*:553, 2(a) notes the use of the interrogative expressing impossibilities. I am grateful to M. Rogland for this latter reference.

speaking the statement must be regarded as a lament and waiting upon YHWH (ליהוה) should be taken as looking forward to some good thing from the deity rather than an impending judgment.<sup>92</sup> It is therefore likely that the question reveals a king expecting, but to this point not receiving, a saving utterance from YHWH. The above interpretation takes into consideration the narrative presentation of Jehoram as a son of Ahab and Jezebel, while at the same time considering the sackcloth a genuine sign of repentance. It is the narrative tension between the presentation of Jehoram as a son of Ahab and the show of repentance which encourages interpretative divergences. We have attempted to handle the narrative in such a way as to stress the negative portrayal while maintaining the positive tension.<sup>93</sup>

With the king's question the first movement of the story, explicating the problem, draws to a close. Elisha's prophetic oracle of salvation in 7.1 is delivered at the most constricted point of the narrative.<sup>94</sup> The story widens and closes its 'aperture' from a besieged city, to a besieged king, to a besieged prophet as Moore has nicely observed: 'The constriction of the scope of action enhances the sense of the constriction of the siege, until finally our vision is focused upon an entrapped prophet, a siege within a siege.'<sup>95</sup> In the prior story it was the Arameans who came down against Elisha (ירד, 6.18) but now it is the king of Israel in the form of the

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<sup>92</sup> *TDOT* 6:54 notes how infrequently the texts, containing יהל with 'God' or 'YHWH' as object, make explicit what is hoped for. Texts speak of waiting for the 'salvation of YHWH' (לחשועת יהוה, Lam 3.26); for his חסד (Ps 33.18; 147.11); his word (דבר, Ps 119.74,81,114,147; 130.5); his ordinance (משפט, Ps 119.43) and his law (חוקה, Isa 42.4).

<sup>93</sup> The present interpretation has some affinities with the position taken by Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:311 and especially n.18. Würthwein sees the sackcloth not at a sign of resignation and hopelessness (contra Schweizer, *Elischa*, 387), but as an attempt to attain something (daß man etwas zu erreichen sucht). He cites 1 Kgs 21.27 but does not make any connection between the characters. Thus the hopelessness of the king is revealed by his comments not his garments.

<sup>94</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 85 doubts that it can be classified as a 'prophetic oracle of salvation' but confusingly claims '[t]he oracle announces deliverance for a stricken city' (p.86). This seems to be a distinction without a difference.

<sup>95</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 98-99. Central to the first movement are the 'wall' (החמה, 6.26, 30) and the door (דלת, 6.32) while the second movement stresses the 'gate' (פתח השער, 7.3) and the 'camp' (קצה המחנה, 7.5, 8). LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 645 likewise treats the story in two movements.

messenger who has come down (יֵרֵד, 6.33) to the prophet. The story proceeds to widen its scope again with the coming of the lepers, only to close in again at the gate (vv. 18-20).

### The Windows in Heaven

Elisha's immediate reply to the question promises a break in the famine within twenty-four hours.<sup>96</sup> Whatever the exact nature of the prediction, it is outlandish enough to generate an immediate response from the king's man (הַשָּׁלִישׁ)<sup>97</sup> to God's man (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים). This response is better taken as a statement of mocking incredulity than a conditional or concessive statement.<sup>98</sup> This is supported by the parallel and

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<sup>96</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 81 provide a detailed discussion of the economic uncertainties involved in Elisha's prediction. They tentatively propose that the predicted abundance is relative since the flour would still be 'many times its normal price.' Greenfield, 'Doves' Dung,' 123 claims, 'the relief promised by Elisha is not very great.' Thiel, 'Character and Function,' 193 claims that it is safest to assume a return to normal prices.

<sup>97</sup> On the difficulties of the term שָׁלִישׁ see C. Rabin, 'Hittite Words in Hebrew,' *Or NS* 32 (1963) 113-39 (133-34); B. A. Mastin, 'Was the *šālīš* the Third Man in the Chariot?,' in J. A. Emerton (ed.) *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament*, VTSup 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1979) 125-54; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 81; D. G. Schley, 'The *šālīšim*: Officers or Special Three-Man Squads?,' *VT* 40 (1990) 321-26. Prior to Mastin it was widely held that the term referred to the third man in the chariot. Mastin challenged this view and argued that the term refers to high ranking officials after the king and senior officers and thus was an officer 'of the third rank' (p.153-54). Schley has recently argued that the *šālīšim* were 'a special cadre of three-man squads which carried out special assignments for the king' (p.326).

<sup>98</sup> Contra most grammars which take this conditionally: GKC §159i; Williams §513; WOC §37.6f (44). According to D. J. McCarthy, 'The Uses of *w'hinnēh* in Biblical Hebrew,' *Biblica* 61 (1980) 330-42 (336) הִנֵּה may be used in conditional statements (Cf. Lev 13.5; Deut 13.15-17; 1 Sam 9.7; 20.12). He treats הִנֵּה in 2 Kgs 7.2, 19 as a concession (337). The particle however need not be rendered this way. Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 389 note that König, *Syntax*, 564 denies the conditional use of הִנֵּה and that Šanda renders it as a statement rather than a condition: 'Lo, YHWH has made (עָשָׂה) ... but will this thing happen?' JM §167(l) states that הִנֵּה 'never appears to have the proper force of *if*.' Among recent commentators *Hobbs*, *2 Kings*, 82 also takes it as a statement, rendering the participle as a substantive: 'Yahweh is the one who makes windows in the heavens. Shall this thing be?' The LXX does not treat it as a conditional but has the future ποιήσει (however according to the BHS note the LXX<sup>t</sup> reads καὶ ἔάν. Interestingly, Harrington and Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan*, 277 n.6, who consistently cite Hebrew Bible differences over against the Aramaic, render: 'Behold the Lord is making windows in the heavens' while the Aramaic is translated: 'If the Lord was opening windows...would it be according to this word?' Sperber reads: אֱלֹהֵי יְיָ פָתַח כִּוִּין...הִידֵּה כַּפְתָּנֻמָּא הַדִּין. See A. Sperber (ed.), *The Bible in Aramaic*, vol. 2, *The Former Prophets According to Targum Jonathan* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 286. N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and his Colleagues* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 104-05 n.144 observes the unconditional nature of the Hebrew syntax at this verse.

vigorous retort of the prophet. Each statement begins with a form of הנה followed by a subject (or subject pronoun) plus a participle expressing a near future event.<sup>99</sup> Each final clause contains a *yiqtol* verb.

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה אֲרָבוֹת בַּשָּׁמַיִם הֲיִהְיֶה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה

'And he said, 'Look! *YHWH* is about to make windows in the heavens. Will this thing happen?' (2 Kgs 7.2a)

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּכָּה רְאֵה בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם לֹא תֹאכַל

'And he said 'Look! *You* are about to see with your eyes. But from there you shall not eat.' (2 Kgs 7.2b)

Taken in a conditional or concessive manner, the officer's scepticism implies that *YHWH* may create heavenly openings that nevertheless will prove ineffective. Over against a conditional rendering, in the interpretation argued for above the officer's statement vigorously questions the ability of *YHWH* to make windows and therefore to provide at all. These *windows of the sky* are present in several other biblical passages (Gen 7.11-12; 8.2; Mal 3.10) and the connection with the windows in the construction of Baal's palace is often noted.<sup>100</sup> While Baal's windows provide openings through which rain falls and thunder echoes, Elisha intimates that it is grain rather than rain which is on its way.<sup>101</sup> Evidence that these 'windows' may be openings for more than rain and thunder is found in Mal 3.10 which states that *YHWH* will open the 'windows of the heavens' (אֲרָבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם) for a more general blessing (בְּרָכָה עַד-בְּלִי-דָי).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> WOC §37.6f has two separate entries for each of these as examples of the so-called *futurum instans*. See also JM §119n which also notes the proximity of הנה. Also the presence the disjunctive *zāqēp parvum* over בַּשָּׁמַיִם may encourage a greater distinction within the sentence than a conditional sentence would allow. The interpretation finds independent support from Barnes, *I & II Kings*, 214 who has roughly the same translation 'since the Hebrew consists of two distinct utterances...The first is a mocking assertion, the second an unbelieving question (so LXX).'

<sup>100</sup> See *KTU* 1.4 v 60-65; *KTU* 1.4 vi 1-10; *KTU* vii 15-29. On the window episode in the Baal Myth see Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 104-05 n.144. Others who have noted the Baal Myth in the context of 2 Kgs 7.3, 19 include: L. Bronner, *Polemics*, 71-74; Gray, *Kings*, 524; LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 647-48; Jones, *Kings*, 2:435

<sup>101</sup> Yet note the comments of Thiel, 'Character and Function,' 192 n.9 who observes that the context of the fulfilment story which follows highlights the eating and drinking of the lepers and various other booty yet does not explicitly mention grain.

<sup>102</sup> However, note the explicitly conditional nature of Mal 3.10.

The give-and-take between prophet and officer serves to recall earlier themes, specifically YHWH's power over the senses with respect to horses and chariots. Previously YHWH's chariots and horses were made visible to Elisha's servant while the armies of Aram were struck with blindness (6.17-18). The Arameans were unable to see, but were nevertheless banqueted (6.23); the officer will see, but will be unable to eat (7.2). As a statement of incredulity the officer's comment about whether YHWH is about to make windows cites an unlikely source of relief in the shape of four lepers. This is not an unusual narrative feature as earlier it was the king of Israel who unknowingly stated a source of help in the mention of Elisha's name (6.31).

### The Lepers' Attack

The narration of the famine relief begins with immediate foreshadowing. With the anterior placement of Elisha (6.32) and the agents of deliverance (וְאֶרְבָּעָה אֲנָשִׁים, v.3) at the heads of their respective sentences, one gains the impression of a series of concomitant incidents stressing temporal overlap: the king on the wall interacts with the woman while Elisha is sitting in his house which takes place while these four men are sitting (יֹשְׁבִים, v.3) at the gate.<sup>103</sup> This is a noteworthy location. Their presence at the 'entrance of the gate' (פֶּתַח הַשָּׁעַר) brings together the earlier despair of the king, who could find no help from the threshing floor (גֵּרֶן, 6.27) and the prediction of the prophet, who foresaw grain in the gate of Samaria (בְּשָׁעַר שָׁמְרוֹן, 7.1). What unifies these three features is the fact that the threshing floor was located at the gate of Samaria (בְּגֵרֶן פֶּתַח שָׁעַר שָׁמְרוֹן, 1 Kgs 22.10).<sup>104</sup> The king can provide no grain from the threshing floor but YHWH's windows (אֲרָבוֹת) shall, in the persons of four

<sup>103</sup> The character changes in 6.32 and 7.3, along with their syntactical similarities, yields structural support to the divisions discussed at the opening of the chapter. Here we might also add the action of אָדָּן in 7.6, which takes place as the lepers sit at the gate, but which is integrated into the story from vv. 5-8.

<sup>104</sup> Because both Moore, *God Saves*, 101-03 and LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 651 have explored the very important theme of the 'gate' elsewhere, it will not be pursued here to any great extent.

(מִצְרָעִים) men who are, it turns out, also lepers (מִצְרָעִים).<sup>105</sup> We will argue below that this latter detail is employed by the narrator to portray the absurdity of the lepers as YHWH's invading force.

These lepers possess stellar reasoning skills with respect to their present crisis and this is narrated with a great deal of humour (vv. 4-5).<sup>106</sup> They are presently trapped between the besieged and the besiegers.<sup>107</sup> To go into the city or to remain at the gate is certain death and therefore they conclude that they should fall upon the Aramean camp (וְנִפְלְאָה אֶל־מִחַנֵּה אֲרָם).<sup>108</sup> The verb נפל is ambiguous in this context. Are the lepers planning on 'surrendering to' or 'attacking' the Arameans?<sup>109</sup> The latter sense should not be too quickly dismissed. First of all one must ask why we are told that they go at evening twilight (בַּשָּׁרָף) which is often a time of concealment (Job 25.15; Prov 7.9).<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 648; Moore, *God Saves*, 101.

<sup>106</sup> Long, *2 Kings*, 93.

<sup>107</sup> Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:312.

<sup>108</sup> The complexity of 7.4 arises from its various conditional statements and the verbal forms utilized. The leper's statement begins with אִם + *qatal* in the protasis followed by a *weqatal* (וְמָתוּ) in the apodosis. See discussion by Driver, *Tenses*, §138i.(a). A similar pattern follows: וְאִם־שָׁבְנוּ פֹה וְמָתוּ. According to Gibson the *qatal* is used in the protasis instead of *yiqtol* (notice this pattern in later conditional of verse 4) in real conditions thereby 'denoting a state or action so regarded which is set in fut. time' (Gibson §121b). Like Gibson, GKC §159n(A) notes the use of perfects in conditions where actions are completely fulfilled either in the past or future. The latter is the so-called *futurum exactum* which is used to 'express actions or facts, which are meant to be indicated as existing in the future in a completed state' (GKC §106o). At GKC §159o(d) they provide examples of the pattern in 2 Kgs 7.4a. WOC 38.2d claim that the protasis of a real conditional is often introduced by אִם followed by either a perfective (citing 2 Kgs 7.4) or non-perfective verb (e.g. Gen 34.15-17). J-M §167h(1) claims that אִם followed by *qatal* often expresses 'past future.'

With respect to the final conditional series (7.4bβ) we find first a *yiqtol* + *yiqtol* (אִם־יָחִינּוּ גִתְיָהּ) followed by a *yiqtol* + *weqatal* (וְאִם־יָמִיתוּ וְמָתוּ). The pragmatics of the *weqatal* in this latter clause rather than a *yiqtol* are worth considering. GKC §112ff claims 'the perfect consecutive [*weqatal*] is used obviously with greater emphasis than the imperfect (גִּתְיָהּ) which immediately precedes.' On this point J-M §176o provides the simpler suggestion that the 'Waw of apodosis' is needed here due to a major pause. Driver §136 I(β) believes that these two patterns are 'not distinguishable in meaning.'

<sup>109</sup> It is common to render this verb as 'surrender,' 'desertion,' or 'go over.' See Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 387; Gray, *Kings*, 524; Jones, *Kings*, 2:436; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 90; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 161. Elsewhere, LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 648 n.21 claims that a double meaning is intended. A clear sense of 'attack' is found in Josh 11.7 with the preposition (עַל) and in Job 1.15. Elsewhere the verb is found governing the prepositions עַל and אֶל and sometimes both within the same verse: 1 Chr 12.20, 21 (in v. 20 נפל is followed by both עַל and אֶל); Jer 52.15 (אֶל) while the parallel passage 2 Kgs 25.11 (עַל). See also Jer 21.9 (עַל); 37.13 (אֶל), 37.14 (עַל); 38.19 (אֶל); 39.9 (עַל).

<sup>110</sup> BDB:676. This lexeme has its own set of ambiguities since it can likewise mean 'morning

Certainly these are dim-witted men, but nightfall does not seem the most felicitous time for surrender when more typically it is a time to prepare for attack (cf. 2 Kgs 6.14). Würthwein comments: 'So wagen sie im Abenddunkel, um nicht vorzeitig entdeckt zu werden, den Gang zum Aramäerlager.'<sup>111</sup> But the whole point of surrender is to give oneself up rather than remain hidden and why go under cloak of darkness if surrender is one's intention? Also were surrender strictly intended here it seems that the narrative would be less ambiguous with respect to the possibility of mercy. Within Kings and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible surrender in siege situations is often associated with life (2 Kgs 18.31-32; 2 Kgs 25.11; Jer 21.8-10) whereas the lepers are uncertain how the Arameans will respond.<sup>112</sup> Contextually, the thought of four lepers attacking an Aramean host by night also adds to what is already a comical situation.

### The God / Prophet Analogy

The relationship between the previously delivered word of YHWH and the manner in which that word is fulfilled, reveals a highly complex narrative. The twice recounted arrival of the lepers at the edge of the Aramean camp (vv. 5, 8) surrounds and emphasises God's actions described with a break in narrative time.<sup>113</sup> Upon

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twilight' (Job 7.4). Nelson, *Kings*, 190 interprets it as 'earliest dawn' since this is the time of traditional holy war attack. However, given that the lepers later argue that they should not wait until the 'light of morning' (v. 9) and that 'the king arose at night' (v. 12), it is better to take עֶשְׂרָה in its more usual sense of 'evening twilight.' For a recent text-critical treatment of this term focusing on the history of interpretation see S. W. Holloway, 'Interpolations,' 543-47.

<sup>111</sup> Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:312. Würthwein translates עָבַד with hinübergehen rather than überlaufen which better reflects the ambiguity of the Hebrew verb.

<sup>112</sup> Note that the LXX at 2 Kgs 7.4 reads ἐμπίσωμεν, a word which is also somewhat ambiguous. LS, s.v. ἐμπίπτω defines as (1) 'to fall in or upon or into'; (2) 'to fall upon, attack'; (3) 'to light or chance upon a thing, to fall in with'; (4) 'to break in, burst in or into'. The Vulgate is more explicit with the use of 'transfugiamus'. Certainly עָבַד may have the sense of 'surrender' as in 2 Kgs 25.11 and Jer 21.8-10.

<sup>113</sup> B. O. Long, 'Framing Repetitions in Biblical Historiography,' *JBL* 106 (1987) 385-99. Long notes how this repetition marks analepsis as the narrator explains 'retrospectively' the emptiness of the Aramean camp (p. 393). The narrative chronology is disrupted 'in the interest of narrative voice' (p. 394). See also Long, *2 Kings*, 94.

arrival, the lepers have no explanation for the state of the Aramean camp observing only its desertion (והנה אין־שם איש, v. 5). However, the subject + *qatal* (וּאֲרָנִי הִשְׁמִיעַ) of verse 6 provides the reader with a pluperfect (and privileged) account of events and provides yet another example of the temporal co-ordination of events evidenced by the fronted subject.<sup>114</sup> With this insight the reader becomes confidant of the narrator, realising the actuality of a miracle about which the narrative participants remain in the dark.<sup>115</sup>

Within the Elisha narratives it is only in 7.6 that YHWH is designated אֲרָנִי. How may this be explained? Elisha earlier claimed, with respect to the messenger, that the sound of his master's footsteps (קוֹל רַגְלֵי אֲרָנָיו, v. 32) would not be far behind. Further, it was noted that the king actually arrived only in the voice of a messenger who then vanished from the narrative stage. Does the narrative encourage a similar relationship between YHWH and Elisha? Within the Elisha narratives YHWH never speaks directly to any character and so one may question whether YHWH is, like the king of Israel, a 'present absence.' Bergen takes this lack of direct speech as evidence that 'YHWH ceases to be an actor, one who causes action to happen.'<sup>116</sup> It is Elisha, like the king's messenger, who speaks for YHWH, commanding his audience to *hear* (שָׁמְעוּ) *the words of YHWH*. And yet Elisha himself is to a great extent, like YHWH, absent from this story. However, it does not follow that the divine and prophetic presence are insignificant within the narrative. While the quantity of narrative space dedicated to a character may indicate that character's importance, the quality and impact of a character's action(s) must also be considered.<sup>117</sup> Elisha's words to the elders take on

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<sup>114</sup> The text may certainly be read differently. Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:308 n.6 considers vv. 6-7 to be a later addition, reading v. 8αα as resumptive repetition ('Wiederaufnahme') of 5βα (עֲדֵר־קִצָּה (ה) מִחֲנֹה).

<sup>115</sup> Long, *2 Kings*, 95. While Nelson, *Kings*, 190 claims that this 'flashback' is a 'rare technique in biblical literature' we see another example of it in 7.17.

<sup>116</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 144.

<sup>117</sup> As Reinhartz notes, 'Unnamed incidental characters often provide crucial links in the plot and contribute to its impact upon the reader' (*Anonymity*, 19). If this is so of the incidental appearances of minor characters it may be even more true for incidental appearances of figures like YHWH and Elisha.

new meaning as the voice of the prophet's master literally follows after him. We read in 7.6 that אֲדָרְנִי 'caused the camp of the Arameans to hear the sound (קול) of chariot, the sound (קול) of a horses, and the sound (קול) of a large army.' In order for Bergen to make his claim stand he must effectively explain (away) the nature of the acting subject in 7.6 since it seems to refer to the action of a divine character. According to Bergen, the narrator of 7.6 fails to give YHWH 'explicit credit for action' since the 'voice' (קול) is not attributed to YHWH but rather to 'my lord' (אֲדָרְנִי).<sup>118</sup> It is somewhat difficult to ascertain exactly what Bergen's point is.<sup>119</sup> He states: 'While clearly the rest of Genesis-2 Kings directs readers to understand this [i.e., אֲדָרְנִי] as a reference to YHWH, the figure of Elisha has been taking over the role of God in much of the Elisha corpus, and thus the identification is not automatic.'<sup>120</sup> Is he is claiming that אֲדָרְנִי refers here to Elisha? If so, this is difficult to accept. Would early readers/hearers of this narrative understand the subject of the *hifil* verb שמע as a reference to something/one other than a divine actor? The fourteen MSS that read ויהוה certainly understood אֲדָרְנִי as a reference to deity.<sup>121</sup>

We argue that the words אֲדָרְנִי and קול encourage a narrative comparison with respect to both of the human and divine kings of Israel (6.32; 7.6) along with their messengers. YHWH's role is indeed transferred to the speaking prophet or as Bergen states it, 'Elisha speaks and it happens'.<sup>122</sup> Similarly we would agree with Bergen that

<sup>118</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 144.

<sup>119</sup> Bergen's interpretation seems somewhat contradictory. In concluding his treatment of the passage he observes that 'YHWH works to cause the Arameans to flee' (p. 147). We are therefore unsure whether he believes that God acts or does not act as he states on page 144.

<sup>120</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 145.

<sup>121</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 389. See also BHS note at 7.6. If Bergen is actually taking this lexeme to refer to Elisha, it is likely to be the only place where it refers to a human figure. Elsewhere, when used of Elisha it is always אֲדָרְנִי (2 Kgs 2.19; 4.16, 28; 5.20, 22; 6.5, 15; 8.12). The grammars and lexicons indicate that אֲדָרְנִי is 'reserved as a designation for Yahweh' (*TLOT*, 1:24) and 'of ' always אֲדָרְנִי' (*HALOT* 1:13). On the other hand אֲדָרְנִי and אֲדָרְנִי 'are used only with reference to people' (*WOC* §7.4.3e). *DCH* 1:134 lists 2 Kgs 7.6 under the heading 'my Lord, Adonai' as a name for YHWH. Under the entry for אֲדָרְנִי there is no separate heading for its use 'of persons' as we find for אֲדָרְנִי.

<sup>122</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 144.

‘the figure of Elisha has been taking over the role of God in much of the rest of the Elisha corpus.’<sup>123</sup> However, in taking over the role of God, Elisha likewise takes over the role of king as God’s representative on earth. The narratives function to dissolve the analogy of the king as a divine representative and establish the prophet as a more appropriate divine representation. It is therefore not surprising that the minimal activity of God is reflected in the minimal activity of his prophet. At the level of narrative this is a possible answer to the question raised above regarding the inactivity of the deity and his prophet. Yet the narrator wishes to make this minimal snack into a full course meal such that by the time he leaves the table the reader is nearly as full of the point as the people are of the food at the gate (7.16b-20). Given the narrative comparisons noted above, we cannot therefore agree that YHWH ‘ceases to be an actor, one who causes action to happen.’<sup>124</sup> The king/messenger – YHWH/Elisha analogy argued for here provide an explanation for the unique use of אָדָנִי in 7.6. The present reading likewise supports prior arguments: the speaking prophet is to the silent deity as the speaking אָדָנִי is to the silent אֱלֹהִים. The sound eventually made by אָדָנִי however, must be observed in a larger narrative and sensual context. On the one hand, the knowledge of the LORD’s action in 7.6 comes as a complete surprise. On the other hand, causing the Arameans to hear (הִשְׁמִיעַ) the three fold voice of chariotry, cavalry and a large army is not unexpected from a deity who earlier opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant and closed the eyes of the Arameans to such realities.<sup>125</sup> The question of God’s presence for a people in an exilic or post-exilic setting facing the departure of prophecy (2 Kgs 2.11-12) and the failure of the monarchy is not difficult to imagine. Indeed we have argued in a prior chapter that the Elisha’s question in 2.14, ‘Where is YHWH God of Elijah?’ following hard upon Elijah’s departure, is a question that these narratives seek to address.

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<sup>123</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 145. See also our earlier treatment of 2 Kgs 5 where we reached a similar conclusion.

<sup>124</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 144.

<sup>125</sup> This is not the same as saying that readers are prepared for the shocking information of 7.6.

## Invasion and Desertion

But if YHWH has caused the Arameans to hear the sound of an invading force, what exactly is its nature? Above it was suggested that the lepers, in an absurd move, set out to attack the Arameans. The story, in fact, further encourages the comparison of the Aramean army with the lepers. In each group a man speaks to his friend/brother (vv. 3, 6, 9), both arise at twilight (vv. 5, 7), and each group acts in the interest of self-preservation (vv. 4, 7b). The Arameans believe that the king of Israel has hired mercenary forces consisting of the 'kings of the Hittites' (הַחִיטִּיִּים) and the 'kings of the Egyptians' (מִצְרַיִם) and yet it is not Egyptians but הַמְצַרְעִים הָאֵלֶּה ('these men who have leprosy,' v. 8) who actually show up for the battle.<sup>126</sup> The behaviour of the lepers, enjoying the fruits of the plunder also mimics actions of a previously captured Aramean army which was sent away after eating and drinking (וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ, 7.8, cf. 6.23).<sup>127</sup> Finally, the lepers claim to be in possession of 'good news' (7.9). Given the comparisons noted above, a military connotation of בְּשֵׂרָה in this context is plausible.<sup>128</sup>

The relationship between the present story and the later portion of 2 Kgs 5 is also worthy of consideration. The leprous men, unlike the soon-to-be leprous Gehazi, experience some pangs of conscience (לֹא-כֵן אֶנְהוּ עֲשִׂים, v. 9a) in their systematic 'tent to tent' removal and hiding of silver, gold, and clothes. Elisha's previous strictures

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<sup>126</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 649 notes the 'Egyptians'/'lepers' word play.

<sup>127</sup> LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 649 remarks that in both instances 'losers become winners.'

<sup>128</sup> The verb has a well attested Semitic usage (*TDOT* 2:313; *HALOT* 1:163). The notion of bringing news is 'often with military significance' (*NIDOTTE* 1:775). Verbal uses in narrative are found at 1 Sam 4.17; 31.9 // 1 Chr 10.9; 2 Sam 4.10; 18. 19, 20, 26, 31; 1 Kgs 1.42). The feminine noun בְּשֵׂרָה is found 6x in BHS (2 Sam 4.10; 18.20, 22, 25, 27; 2 Kgs 7.9). The nominal occurrences in 2 Sam 4.10; 18.22 connote a 'messenger's reward' (*TDOT* 2:314; *HALOT* 1:164). However *DCH* 2:276 translates אֵין-בְּשֵׂרָה (2 Sam 18.22) 'there is no news' rather than 'there is no reward.' There is some debate about whether the word is neutral or positive (*TDOT* 1:314-15). Although the messenger may believe that he bears good news, the recipients do not always concur. This is most apparent with the news brought to David regarding the death of Saul and later Absalom.

against taking plunder from the Arameans are apparently lifted. His prior question to Gehazi, 'Is this the time...?' (5.26b) is answered positively by the lepers who state:

היום הִזָּה יוֹם־בְּשִׁרָהּ הוּא וְאֵנָּחְנוּ מִחֲשִׁים וְחִכִּינוּ עַד־אֹר הַבֶּקֶר וּמִצָּאָנוּ עֹוֹן וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וְנִבְאָה וְנִגִּידָה  
בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ

'Today is a day of [good] news and we are keeping silent. And if we wait until the morning punishment will find us. So now come and let us go and let us inform the house of the king' (2 Kgs 7.9).

The reader is again privy to the leper's reasoning: now is the time to exploit the abandoned Aramean camp. The present inactivity is inappropriate and waiting for the sunrise will only bring more trouble. In the other occurrence of וְאֵנָּחְנוּ מִחֲשִׁים (1 Kgs 22.3) the king of Israel decries the fact that Israel and Judah have done nothing to regain possession of Ramoth Gilead from the king of Aram. Elsewhere the *hifil* participle of חָשָׂה is found in a similar military context in Judges 18.9 where the Danites are chastened for doing nothing (וְאֵתָם מִחֲשִׁים) to take possession of Laish. These examples may further support the idea that the lepers are humorously portrayed as an invading army. It is clear from the narrative presentation that the hiding of plunder is problematic for the lepers. What exactly is the nature of the עֹוֹן which they fear will find them? This question is difficult to answer.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps having hidden silver, gold, and clothes like Achan (Josh 7.21), the lepers fear his fate and reason that they must make their good fortune known before dawn. The previous conclusion that they should attack the Aramean camp (וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וְנִפְלָה אֶל־מַחֲנֵה אָרָם (v. 4b) is matched by their present reasoning:

וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וְנִבְאָה וְנִגִּידָה בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ (v. 9b).

The delivery of the good news that the camp is deserted moves from outside the walls of the city to the king's inner residence. The deliberations of the lepers (v. 9) are balanced by the deliberations of the king (v. 12) with the central report of the

<sup>129</sup> See Gibson §123; J-M §167b(3) on the *weqatal* forms used in 7.9aβ expressing a conditional sentence (Gen 44.22, Jer 18:4). See *BDB*:593 s.v. מִצָּא (3) for the sense of *come upon*, *light upon*. The discovery (מִצָּא) of עֹוֹן are found together in Gen 44.16; Ps 32.5; 36.3; Jer 50.20; Hos 12.9.

abandoned camp (vv. 10-11).<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the king's scepticism is entirely justified given the larger narrative context.<sup>131</sup> Elisha, for example, had warned the king earlier about the possibility of an Aramean ambush (2 Kgs 6.9). In providing his spin on the current situation, the king reports to his servants what he believes to be the Aramean's strategy. They have hidden saying: 'if they [the Israelites] come out from the city then we will take them alive' (v. 13).<sup>132</sup> It appears that Jehoram is merely reacting to what he knows of prior military strategy and so we see no reason to view his decision negatively. Interestingly, the double occurrence of **הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת-הַחַיִּים** as a command from Ben-Hadad (1 Kgs 20.18) comes with respect to news that men are coming out from Samaria (1 Kgs 20.17).<sup>133</sup>

Possibility becomes reality when the people actually come out of Samaria. Ironically, they leave not to be taken alive, but rather to plunder (**בָּזְזוּ**) the Aramean camp and thus to live. In Deut 20.1-4 Moses commands the people not to fear when they see the large numbers of chariots, horses, and people coming against them in war. The priest is to come forward and remind them not to panic (**אֲלֵ-תַחֲפוּזוּ**, v. 3b) when going into battle. Fortunately for the inhabitants of Samaria, no such instructions were given to the Aramean army who, upon hearing the sound of YHWH's army, abandon their goods 'in their panic' (**בְּהִתְחַפְּזוֹם**, v. 15). The phrase **וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם** in verse 16 unites two broader themes. Examination of verses where **יָצָא** and **עָרַב** are proximate, reveals a general pattern which moves from a predominance of references to 'salvation' in the Torah to a similar predominance for 'battle'

<sup>130</sup> According to Parker, *Stories*, 123 the eventual liberation of the city is delayed by the pondering of the lepers, the king, and the reconnaissance mission.

<sup>131</sup> Several commentators view the king's actions negatively, for example, LaBarbera, 'Man of War,' 650; Nelson, *Kings*, 191; Long, *2 Kings*, 94.

<sup>132</sup> **כִּי-יֵצֵאוּ מִן-הָעִיר וְנִתְחַפְּסוּ הַיָּמִים**. The phrase **כִּי-יֵצֵאוּ** is translated conditionally (J-M §167i). Support for a conditional interpretation is found in F. T. Kelly, 'The Imperfect,' 11 who claims that **וְנִתְחַפְּסוּ** at 2 Kgs 7.12 is 'the apodosis of a relative conditional clause after **כִּי**.' On the so-called 'waw of apodosis' in conditional clauses see J-M §176d.

<sup>133</sup> As Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 91 observes, the ambush strategy is also adopted by Joshua (Josh 8.4-7) and Abimelech (Judg 9.42-45).

references in the Former Prophets.<sup>134</sup> In 2 Kgs 7.16, arguably the climax of this narrative,<sup>135</sup> we find a hybrid verse in which both themes are reflected: the people go forth to attain the spoils of war (battle) and in so doing acquire the life-giving grains previously foretold by Elisha ‘according to the word of YHWH’ (7.16b).

In the recapitulation (7.17-20), as if to contrast the return of life associated with Elisha’s delivery of YHWH’s word, the narrator immediately informs us of the death associated with the king.<sup>136</sup> The officer he had appointed (וְהַמְלִיךְ הַפְקִיד, v. 17a) overseer of the gate is trampled there by the people and dies (וַיִּרְמָסְהוּ הָעָם בְּשַׁעַר וְיָמָת, vv. 17aβ, 20b).<sup>137</sup> This narrative contrast between life and death, prophet and king, argues against Bergen’s conclusion that ‘the king is concerned with the suffering of his people, YHWH works to cause the Arameans to flee, but Elisha is concerned with a personal vendetta against a particular officer. The narrative ends with death (וְיָמָת, v. 20), whereas the story continues with celebration of the people of Samaria.’<sup>138</sup> Undeniably, the narrative ends with death, but a death that the narrative explicitly links to an appointment made by the king. With respect to Elisha and YHWH, things are much more complicated since both bring blessing and cursing, life and death. As Domeris observes in commenting upon 7.16, ‘Here the element of salvation, which

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<sup>134</sup> The following list was compiled using BibleWorks 4.0 searching for verses containing **צָלַח** and **צָלַח** anywhere in the verse in any order. For references to salvation see Exod 3.10, 12; 6.7; 7.4; 11.8; 12.31; 13.3; 18.1; 32.11; Deut 4.20; 9.26, 29; 1 Kgs 8.16, 51, 53; 2 Kgs 7.16. For references to battle see Num 20.20; 21.23; 33; Deut 2.32; 3.1; 20.1; Josh 8.5; 8.14; 11.4; Judg 9.29-43 passim; 20.31; 1 Sam 11.7; 18.5, 13; 2 Sam 11.17; 18.2, 3, 4, 6; 1 Kgs 8.44.

<sup>135</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 191 states that plot (siege) and subplot (oracle) come to a climax in v. 16.

<sup>136</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 103. Moore notes the unexpected and ‘unofficial channels’ through which life flows in this story. The king’s power however ‘is associated more and more with death’. Although we accept his point, we would disagree with his view that the king’s rejection of the ‘news’ is further evidence of this death association. The call for the prophet’s head and the death of the officer are evidence enough.

<sup>137</sup> The pronominal suffix (v. 17) gives way to a pronominal suffix attached to sign of the direct object in 20b. Although the verb **רָמַס** is not uncommon, it occurs only in the Former Prophets in 2 Kings (7.17, 20; 9.33; 14.9). It is used in 9.33 of the trampling of Jezebel.

<sup>138</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 147-48.

will become key in the prophets, makes its appearance.<sup>139</sup> However we may also say that with Elisha, the voice of judgment comes after him.

### Conclusion

Five major arguments have been set forth in this treatment of 2 Kgs 6.24-7.20. It was first argued, based on the use of the verb **צִעַק**, that Elisha is portrayed as a royal figure. The studies of S. Meier and R. N. Boyce, in particular, examine the use of this verb. Meier's work points out the importance of the verb in the overall corpus of the northern prophetic narratives, while Boyce considers its significance with respect to the relationship of kings and their subjects. Further it was argued that Elisha is characterised as one who can both save and judge, while the king of Israel can do neither. The spectre of Elisha, in the exchange between the king and the woman with its repetition of the root **יָשַׁע**, further encourages us to question both the famine (why?) as well as the lack of divine/prophetic activity (where?).

Secondly, it was argued that the king of Israel is portrayed in a negative light within the narrative. The ubiquitous portrayal of famines throughout the northern prophetic tales (1 Kgs 18.2; 2 Kgs 4.38; 6.25; 7.4; 7.12; 8.1) reflect YHWH's judgment upon the Omrides. The cannibalism of the people mirrors the cannibalism of the monarchy. The fact that the king of Israel calls for the prophet's head is difficult to paint in a positive light. We noticed a variety of narrative features that connect the king of Israel in 2 Kgs 6.24-33 with Ahab and Jezebel. Examination of the phrase **הַמֶּלֶךְ מִן־הַלֵּךְ** led to a novel, but we hope plausible, interpretation of the relationship of the *king* to the *messenger* in 6.32-33 and to the conclusion that the king is indeed portrayed as the problem. When combined with the examination of **רָצַח** which followed, we believe that Lasine's view of Jehoram as more like Moses than Ahab is not sustainable.

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<sup>139</sup> NIDOTTE, 1:632. It is worth considering the relationship between the language here and the agricultural concerns of the Minor Prophets (e.g., Joel 1-2; Hab 3.17; Hag 2.19; Zech 8. 11-12)

Next we explored the confusing portrayal of a king who, like Ahab, wears sackcloth in one verse, while in the next calls for the prophet's head like Jezebel. Detailed narrative observations led to the conclusion that *the* disaster of 2 Kgs 6.33b is anaphoric with reference to *that* disaster promised to Ahab in 1 Kgs 21.29. Similarly, the presence of sackcloth, so often interpreted as evidence for the king's repentance, is upon closer inspection, also another tie to Ahab. We also argued that taking *son of a murderer* as a reference to Ahab is legitimate. Finally, the king's question, 'Why should I wait...?' portrays a monarch who believes that the *disaster* promised to his progenitor has finally arrived. The king of Israel in 2 Kgs 6.24ff., aware of the prior judgment issued against his father's house, anxiously looks over his shoulder not only in 2 Kgs 6-7 but on several other occasions in the Elisha corpus.

Fourth, it was argued that the lepers are not surrendering to, but rather attacking the Aramean army. The word play, the time at which they go to the Aramean camp, the description of the actions of both lepers and Arameans, the possibility that they bring news from the battle field, and the fact that the fact that the people plunder the deserted camp as if after a military victory, all support this interpretation. At the climax of the narrative (v. 16), the twin themes of salvation and battle are brought together.

Fifth, we provided an explanation for the unique use of אֲדָרָיִךְ in 2 Kgs 7.6. It was argued that with the use of אֲדָרָיִךְ and קוֹל (6.32; 7.6), an analogy is established between the king / messenger and YHWH / prophet. We agree with Bergen that Elisha is taking over the role of YHWH, and by extension king, but we cannot agree that the use of אֲדָרָיִךְ somehow does away with YHWH as an actor in the story. Elisha takes over the role of king as God's representative on earth and in so doing creates a prophet-like-God analogue to replace the king-like-God analogue.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE APPEARANCE OF COHERENCE (2 KINGS 8.1-15)

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we argued for the breakdown of the king-as-YHWH representation and the forging of a novel prophet as YHWH representation. By default the prophet now assumes kingly representation and stature; he has replaced the king as a divine representative on earth. It would be interesting to consider whether or not this could be argued throughout the wider range of the narratives. If so, then we would have discerned a 'global intention' for a collection of seemingly disparate narratives arising from a close reading of those narratives. But we should not get ahead of ourselves. Our present task is to examine the remaining stories (2 Kgs 8.1-15) in order to ascertain whether Elisha is similarly represented as 'God' and 'king'.

Several questions arise from an initial reading of these stories. What is the meaning of the heavy concentration of the verb *חיה* in the two narratives? Why does the narrator bring together such disparate figures in 8.1-6? What is the significance of Elisha's 'great things'? Why does the prophet weep before Hazael? What are we to make of Elisha's deceptive words in verse 10? What of the highly ambiguous vv. 11 and 15? We will attempt to answer some of these questions below.

By way of background, 8.1-6 weaves narrative threads into an odd tapestry of characters who appear together in the stories for the first time.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this coalescence will be considered in due course. The Shunammite woman from 4.1-37 returns in 8.1-6 in a story about which Van Seters writes:

The story of the seven-year famine (2 Kings 8:1-6) not only refers back to an earlier story (4:18ff.) but also suggests a collection of such stories. In verses 4-5 the king inquires of Gehazi, Elisha's servant, 'about all the great things Elisha

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<sup>1</sup> M.-L. Ryan, 'On the Window Structure of Narrative Discourse,' *Semiotica* 64 (1987) 59-81. In Ryan's terminology a 'narrative thread' is simply the destiny or fate of a particular character. There are as many narrative threads as there are characters. 'When a number of destinies are tied together in a series of actions aimed at a specific goal, we have a narrative subplot' (64).

had done.' This is not an independent *legenda* [sic] but a rather artificial creation to give a sense of unity, which the collection otherwise lacks.'<sup>2</sup>

Cogan and Tadmor set forth 'associative literary linking' as an explanation for the presence of this story after the events of 6.24-7.20: in both stories Elisha has knowledge of future events and in each the king is sought to render justice.<sup>3</sup> Whether this portion of the story was separated from 2 Kgs 4.1-37 and placed in this later position or created expressly for it by a final editor is not particularly relevant for the present study.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Van Seters does not consider the possibility that good storytelling may require the departure from a strictly linear mode of narration and the resumption of its temporal thread. This is a feature of narrative generally and biblical narrative in particular.<sup>5</sup> In re-presenting a believable world, narrative may and indeed at times must, present parallel actions and processes sequentially due to the nature of language. The non-linear nature of discourse organisation requires numerous contexts to remain open at the same time.<sup>6</sup> As Ryan notes:

Even if life is parallel, language remains sequential. At any given moment, it can only focus on one event and its participants. Simultaneous processes must be represented sequentially. This means that the 'eye' of the narrative discourse must be able to shift from one corner of the reference world to another. The understanding of narrative requires of the reader the ability to connect the events currently represented with other processes whose description has been temporarily suspended.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 305.

<sup>3</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 87. Also recalling that a woman makes an appeal for justice in the prior story, A. Rofé, claims that it is 'associative order' which is behind the placement of 8.1-6 [*The Prophetic Stories* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988) 51]. See also S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 271.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that it is an unimportant question for exegesis. For a discussion of the varying opinions see U. Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm, *Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997) 228-231. We find attractive Simon's conclusion that the story is 'utterly different from the story of the woman of Shunem in its narrative mode but totally dependent on it for its content.' Simon believes that it is not a part of the story of 2 Kgs 4.7-37, but an 'intra-scriptural response' to it (p. 230).

<sup>5</sup> T. Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Narrative*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, 'Window Structure,' 59.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan, 'Window Structure,' 61. See Nelson, *Kings*, 8-9 for similar comments on structure.

Beyond the strange constellation of characters, we also desire to take up the question of Elisha's 'great deeds' but towards an end that moves us beyond questions of compositional history, or mere 'hype' for the holy man. Attention to lexical, grammatical and narrative details will confirm that Elisha is being portrayed in ways usually reserved for YHWH or royal figures.

### 2 Kings 8.1-3: The Restoration of Life and the Man of God

Again the story commences with *we* + subject + *qatal* indicative of a new episode in v.1. With the immediate play on Elisha's name that begins the story (וְאֵלִישָׁע דִּבֶּר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה), the possibility arises that the prophet's 'helping acts' will be of central concern in what is to follow. This is confirmed by the appearance of the phrase אֲשֶׁר־הֵחִיָּה אֶת־בְּנָהּ, which immediately follows and its reiteration within this story, occurring once in v.1 and thrice in v.5. The frequency of the verb חִיָּה within the two narratives (8.1-15) alerts us to consider its importance in some detail.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the four appearances of the verb in the first story of chapter 8, it is found in the *hifil* stem only. The *hifil* of חִיָּה is found a total of 23 times in the Hebrew Bible within a variety of contexts.<sup>9</sup> These may indicate: (1) God's sustenance or preservation of life through human agency (Gen 6.19, 20; 45.7; 47.25; 50.20), or the sparing/sustaining (or ending) of one human life by another, including self-preservation (Num 31.18; Josh 2.13; 6.25; 9.20; Judg 8.19; 2 Sam 8.2; Ezek 13.22); (2) the immediate preservation or sustenance of life, health, or spirit by God or his messengers (Gen 19.19; Num 22.33; Josh 14.10; Isa 38.16; 57.15 [2x]); (3) the restoration of life to the dead. This latter category is found only within the Elisha

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<sup>8</sup> Within 8.1-15 the verb is found a total of 10 times in 6 verses (8.1, 5 (3x), 8, 9, 10 (2x), 14 (2x)). In noting the importance of the verb for 8.1-15, Rofé claims, 'This is a common phenomenon in the arrangement of biblical passages' (*The Prophetic Stories*, 51).

<sup>9</sup> See Even-Shoshan: 363; *TDOT* 4:331; *TLOT* 1:412-13; Although *DCH* 3:207 lists all 23 occurrences in the body of its article, it has '22' as the number of occurrences immediately after its *hifil* entry.

narratives and is used of God (2 Kgs 5.7) or his prophet (8.1, 5[3x]).<sup>10</sup> The sense ‘restoration of life’ is found also in the *qal* stem (1 Kgs 17.22 of the נָפֵשׁ; 2 Kgs 13.21; Job 14.14; Isa 26.14, 19; Ezek 37.3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14 of the רָיַח; and in the *piel* (1 Sam 2.6; Deut 32.39; Hos 6.2; Psa 71.20).

These texts emphasise that ‘restoration of life’ is the prerogative of the deity alone. The only human characters who unequivocally restore life to the dead are Elijah and Elisha; however, the narrative emphasis is different in each case. While both prophets seek YHWH’s assistance, Elijah by calling (וַיִּקְרָא, 1 Kgs 17.21) and Elisha by praying (וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל, 2 Kgs 4.33; 6.17, 18), YHWH’s involvement is more direct in the case of Elijah (1 Kgs 17.22). The raising of the boy is due to YHWH’s hearing of the prophet’s petition; the use of the *qal* emphasises the child’s return to a state of living. This is also true of 2 Kgs 13.21 where the narrative focuses upon the man’s return to life, rather than causative action of a dead prophet. On the other hand the use of the *hifil* in 2 Kgs 8.1, 5 moves the spotlight onto Elisha’s action and its effect on the child as a passive object, without mention of YHWH. While it is true that the *qal*, *piel*, and *hifil* stems are all used in contexts which depict the restoration of life, there are subtle narrative emphases among the portrayals at least within the northern prophetic narratives.<sup>11</sup> The point is that, besides YHWH, only Elisha is the subject of

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<sup>10</sup> The formal equivalent (הִחְיֶה) is found only at Josh 6.25; 14.10; 2 Kgs 8.1, 5)

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere note the *qal* and the *piel* in Hos 6.2 where the *qal* is intransitive and the *piel* factitive for the verb חָיָה. This comports well with the discussion in WOC §24.1.h-i; 24.2.a-b. Following Jenni, a class of verbs is discussed in which we find the *qal* intransitive, *piel* factitive (i.e., ‘it designates an effected state and governs an object,’ WOC §24.2.b), and the *hifil* causative. The *piel* brings about a state rather than an action as in the *hifil*. The object of the *hifil* ‘is in a state of suffering the effects of an action’ and is ‘inherently passive’ (WOC §24.1.i). This view of the relationships between the stems is controversial and contradictory examples may be found. See J. Hughes, review of *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’ Connor, *JJS* 4 (1993) 132-37 (133). These concerns notwithstanding, the distinctions are valid for the occurrences of חָיָה in the *qal*, *piel*, and *hifil* within 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13: the *qal* is intransitive (1 Kgs 17.22; 20.32; 2 Kgs 1.2; 4.7; 7.4; 8.8, 9, 10, 14; 10.19, 11.12); the *piel* takes a direct object (1 Kgs 18.5; 20.31; 2 Kgs 7.4, here note especially the back to back use of *piel* and *qal* in the phrase ‘if they spare us, will will live’ [אִם־יִחְיֶינָהּ נִחַתָּה]); and the *hifil* is causative (2 Kgs 5.7, 8.1, 5).

the *hifil* of חיה and thus from the standpoint of narrative presentation or perception is the only human figure portrayed acting ‘causatively’ to restore the dead to life.<sup>12</sup>

As it unfolds, the story discloses some things to us but is silent about others. Elisha is clearly concerned for the well-being of the woman and her family, but the reader is not privy to his epistemological certainty. How has Elisha learned about the oncoming famine and its length (cf. 8.12)? Unlike Joseph, he is given no dreams of seven thin cows or seven blighted ears of grain (Gen 41.4, 6) to interpret; dreams which would explain his knowledge of seven years of famine. Neither is there an explicit divine word or evidence of prophetic ecstasy. Such questions will become particularly relevant in the story which follows. For now we may note that these observations appear to sever the connection between prophet and deity. YHWH does not speak to Elisha concerning this famine and we receive no ‘*thus says YHWH*’ as in the prior story (7.1); our discovery that YHWH has called for a famine coincides with the woman’s. However, the narrative presentation does not allow for so easy a separation of the divine and prophetic word particularly if the prophet is given divine characterisation. In fact, the narrative, in the actions of the woman, equates divine word with prophetic word.

The series of *wayyiqtol* verbs in v.2 surround and highlight the obedience of the woman and her household to the prophetic warnings of the oncoming famine.<sup>13</sup>

And the woman arose  
and did according to the word of the man of God  
and she went, she and her household  
and she sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years

וַתִּקַּם הָאִשָּׁה  
וַתַּעַשׂ כְּדִבְרֵי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים  
וַתֵּלֶךְ הִיא וּבֵיתָהּ  
וַתֵּגֵר בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים:

The narrator spells out in detail the command of the prophet in v.1 (קוּמִי וּלְכִי... וְגוֹרִי) and, using the same verbs, portrays the immediate response of the woman in v.2 (וַתִּקַּם... וַתֵּלֶךְ... וַתֵּגֵר). The verb (עָשָׂה), not present, but of course implied in Elisha’s

<sup>12</sup> On 2 Kgs 8.5, J. Weingreen, ‘The Pi’el in Biblical Hebrew,’ *Henoah* 5 (1980) 21-29 (25), claims that אֲשֶׁר-הֵחִיָה אֶת-הַמֵּת ‘must mean “(Elisha) who had brought the dead (child) back to life)’ [sic].

<sup>13</sup> Elisha’s function, with respect the Shunammite is not unlike YHWH’s with respect to Elijah (1 Kgs 17.1-5).

prior commands, is made explicit in v.2. Thus the departure of the woman and her family is ‘according to the word of the man of God.’ Note also that the ground of Elisha’s command (בִּי־קָרָא יְהוָה לָרֶעֱב וְגַם־בָּא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים) v.1b)<sup>14</sup> is the basis for both the length of her stay and the time of her return: she stays for seven years in the land of the Philistines and at the end of those seven years she returns from the land of the Philistines (vv.2bβ-3a). This command portrays divine action while hinting at other royal associations within the Former Prophets.<sup>15</sup> While her departure emphasises trust in the word of the man of God (she *arose*, she *did*, she *went*, she *stayed*), the length of stay and return manifest trust in the word (and actions) of YHWH as reported by the man of God. Put another way, YHWH has called for a seven year famine, and it is after seven years that she returns. Making her way back to ‘cry out’ (לִצְעֵק) v.3b) to the king, she will soon be ‘crying out’ (צִעֲקָה) v.5aβ) for her home and land.<sup>16</sup>

The text never tells us that the famine ends; however, it is implied in the actions of the woman. The prophetic command is inextricably linked to the divine call and the woman and her family do not take one without the other. We would therefore reject Bergen’s claim that ‘the story makes a very clear distinction between prophetic word and word of YHWH.’<sup>17</sup> Rofé is closer to the mark when he observes that the Word of God is not described as being ‘transmitted to the prophet, but as

<sup>14</sup> The phrase בִּי־קָרָא יְהוָה in verse 1 has יְהוָה as its subject in its only occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (4x). Outside of the Elisha cycle (2 Kgs 3.10, 13; 8.1), it is found only in Deut 15.2 in a text dealing with the cancelling of debts at the end of seven years (Deut 15.1).

<sup>15</sup> So YHWH commands Isaac to sojourn in the land of the Philistines during a famine with a promise of land (Gen 26.1-6; cf. Gen 12.10 with no command from YHWH). The oddity of finding the land of the Philistines portrayed as a place of refuge for the Shunammite provides several narrative connections with David as well. It is David and his men, for example, who also obtain refuge in the land of the Philistines (1 Sam 27.1), and it is David who is otherwise linked to a Shunammite woman (1 Kgs 1.3, 15; 2 17, 21, 22). It is also interesting that in the transitional verses between David’s stay with the Philistines (2 Sam 27), and Saul’s inquiry of the medium (2 Sam 28), we find Philistines camped at Shunem (1 Sam 28.4).

<sup>16</sup> We shall need to consider why it is that the king, who was of little help to a woman in a prior famine setting (6.24-30), is able to render assistance now.

<sup>17</sup> Bergen, *Elisha*, 150.

spontaneously issuing from him at the moment of need. The prophet is a “Man of God” in the sense that he incorporates Divinity, a kind of Godly emanation, by whose power he acts.’<sup>18</sup>

### 2 Kings 8.4-6: The Great Things of YHWH and the Great Things of Elisha

Meanwhile, the forward narrative movement is paused in v.4 while the narrator, with the use of *we* + subject + participle (וְהַמֶּלֶךְ מְדַבֵּר), shifts the camera’s attention to an ongoing conversation taking place between the king and Gehazi:

...סִפְּרָה נָא לִי אֵת כָּל-הַגְּדֹלוֹת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים...

‘...Please recount for me all of the great things that Elisha has done.’ (2 Kgs 8.4).

The importance of the king’s request in the overall narrative structure is noted by A. G. van Daalen who argues for a ring-shaped composition that emphasises the king’s request. The outermost ring, formed by the verb and its complement in v.3b (לְצַעֵק אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-בֵּיתָהּ וְאֶל-שָׂדֶה), is countered by the verb and its complement in v.5aβ (צִעֲקָהּ אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-בֵּיתָהּ וְעַל-שָׂדֶה). The innermost ring is formed by the two participles describing the king’s address to Gehazi (וְהַמֶּלֶךְ מְדַבֵּר, v.4) and Gehazi’s address to the king (וַיְהִי הוּא מְסַפֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ, v.5). Van Daalen observes that the king’s command stands in the middle.<sup>19</sup> As we proceed we will argue that the verb used to request this information and the type of information which is requested each serve to portray the prophet in YHWH-like colours.

First, the king begins with a request to Gehazi. As with the prior discussion of חִיָּה, in order to establish the plausibility the argument, it is necessary to give some attention to lexical matters. The three occurrences of the verb סָפַר in 2 Kings are found in our story in the *piel* stem (8.4, 5, 6). The *piel* stem of סָפַר is followed by ל in a number of narrative contexts similar to 2 Kgs 8.4. Important for our purposes are

<sup>18</sup> Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 18 n.8.

<sup>19</sup> A. G. van Daalen, “Vertel mij toch al het grote dat Elisa gedaan heeft.” *Onderzoek naar de compositie van II Kon 8:1-6 en 4:8-37*, *ACEBT* 1 (1980) 51-61 (51-52). The textual layout is located on page 53.

those several instances where it is used to recount the actions of an individual: Isaac's servant *recounts* (ויספר) to him 'all the things which he had done' (כל־הדברים אשר עשה, Gen 24.66); Moses *recounts* (ויספר) to his father-in-law all that YHWH had done to Pharaoh (כל־הדברים אשר עשה, Exod 18.8); Gideon raises questions concerning the whereabouts of YHWH's wonders (כל־נפלאותיו) which were *recounted* by the fathers (Judg 6.13); the sons of the old prophet *recount* to him 'the whole deed which the man of God had done (כל־המעשה אשר־עשה איש־האלהים) 1 Kgs 13.11). In explicitly theological poetic settings, the Psalmist *recounts* numerous acts of God: Ps 26.7, 75.2, 78.3-4 (פלא); 44.2 (פעל); 66.16 (עשה); 73.28 (מלאכה). In a large majority of these examples, both narrative and poetic, it is divine acts which are the object of the verb.<sup>20</sup> Typically the Elisha *legenda* are viewed as stories told to promote the holy man. The use of the verb outlined above, at least gives us pause to consider a wider purpose to the story of 8.1-6. The king's request that Gehazi 'recount' does more than exalt the prophet if the object of that request is also kept in view; the king desires to hear about all of Elisha's great deeds. Keeping in mind the two verses previously noted which describe the actions of persons (Gen 24.66; 1 Kgs 13.11), the king asks for information using a verb that, in a majority of instances, is employed to describe the actions of the deity.<sup>21</sup> It is not unreasonable to ask whether the narrator is attempting to equate the actions of Elisha with YHWH's actions.<sup>22</sup> In light of the use

<sup>20</sup> See *TDOT* 10:312, *TLAT* 2:810, and *NIDOTTE* 3:284 which note the prominent theological relevance of the verb, particularly in the Psalter. In our examples above, the exceptions are Gen 24.66 (the acts of Isaac's servant) and 1 Kgs 13.11 (the action of the man of God). There are, of course, other examples of ספר + ל used in different contexts. A number of these found in the Joseph stories and elsewhere, concern the relating of dreams: Gen 37.9, 10 (אל + ספר); 40.8, 9; 41.8, 12; Judg 7.13; Jer 23.27. Other texts relate a general explanation of events: Gen 29.13; Num 13.27; Josh 2.23; Est 5.11; 6.13; or tell of various aspects of the deity: Ps 2.7 (his statute; אל + ספר); Ps 22.23; 102.22 (his name); Ps 48.14 (Zion, his city); Ps 79.13; Isa 43.21 (his praises, תהלה); Ps 78.5-6 (testimony [עדות] and Torah). The remaining examples in the Psalms concern evildoers: Ps 50.16; 64.6. Finally in Joel 1.3 it is the judgment of God which is to be related to the following generations.

<sup>21</sup> It is also important to remember that the discussion is limited to a specific grammatical construction viz., ל + ספר.

<sup>22</sup> The verb נדר (*declare, tell*) is used extensively in the Elisha narratives with respect to the human communication of what was previously unknown (4.2, 7, 31; 5.4; 6.11, 12, 13; 7.9, 10, 11, 12, 15; 8.7) It could have been used in 2 Kgs 8.4. In 2 Kgs 4.27 it is used of YHWH's communication to a human:

of *הַגְדִּלוֹת סִפֵּר* in similar contexts, there may be more than meets the eye in the term *הַגְדִּלוֹת*. This object of the verb requires further examination.

The feminine plural absolute of the adjective *גָּדוֹל* occurs 42 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>23</sup> Besides 2 Kgs 8.4, the articular form (*הַגְדִּלוֹת*) is found elsewhere in Deut 7.19, 10.21, 29.2, and Josh 24.17 in contexts not unlike those previously noted with *סִפֵּר*.<sup>24</sup> The theological significance of these examples is apparent as each highlights the acts of YHWH in the Exodus event. In Deut 7.19, 29.2 it is used attributively to describe the ‘great testings’ (*הַמַּסְנוֹת הַגְדִּלוֹת*) YHWH brought upon Egypt. A similar attributive use is found in Josh 24.17 where the people admit that it was YHWH who did ‘these great signs’ (*הָאֲתוֹת הַגְדִּלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה*). In Deut 10.21, the final articular form, it is used substantivally of the ‘great things’ which God has done. This final category is particularly important since the substantival is used frequently to describe the ‘great things’ done by the deity.<sup>25</sup> The great deeds of Elisha are therefore described in terms similar to ‘the great acts of God in nature and history’.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the narrative portrayal of Elisha found in 2 Kgs 8.1-6, viewed within a specific linguistic and narrative context, mimics the portrayal of YHWH. Both prophet and deity bring life to the dead, the word of the prophet and the word of YHWH are inseparable, and the deeds of each are retold using similar vocabulary (*גְדִלוֹת/סִפֵּר*).

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he has not *told* Elisha the reason for the Shunammite’s distress. However, we hold that the presence of *סִפֵּר* in 2 Kgs 8.4-6 connects Elisha’s deeds with YHWH’s salvific deeds.

<sup>23</sup> Even-Shoshan: 225.

<sup>24</sup> The other articular form is a substantive in Ezek 16.61 describing *the older* of two sisters.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the ‘great things’ (*גְדִלוֹת*) of God in Job 5.9, 10; 37.5; Ps 71.19, 106.21. In the remaining substantival uses: YHWH commands Jeremiah to call upon him so that the prophet may learn ‘great things’ (Jer 33.3); Baruch is urged not to seek ‘great things’ for himself (Jer 45.5); the Psalmist claims that he does not walk in ‘great things’ (Ps 131.1); Psalm 12.4 mentions the tongue that speaks of ‘great things’; and Ps 104.25 notes animals small and large.

<sup>26</sup> *TDOT* 2:401. The articular examples claim an empirical aspect for ‘the great deeds’: Deut 7.19, 10.21, 29.2, ‘which your eyes have seen’ (*אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ*); and Josh 24.17, ‘and which he did before our eyes’ (*וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְעֵינֵינוּ*).

## *A Strange Constellation: Leper, Lord, and Lady*

It remains for us to consider the odd gathering of the Shunammite, Gehazi, and the king in 2 Kgs 8.1-6 and the absence of Elisha. Here it must be admitted that we can only make the barest of beginnings in attempting an explanation. In the earlier discussion of 2 Kgs 4 the difficulty of discerning a general structure to the Elisha stories was noted. It was, nevertheless, pointed out that the narratives alternate in a manner that might be called 'people to politics.' That is, the stories move back and forth from the concerns of common people to political concerns and back again.<sup>27</sup> While von Rad recognises the importance of Elisha as a wonder-worker, he attempts to make Elisha's real work not people but politics.<sup>28</sup> We would argue that these are difficult to separate, the present story being a prime example. In 8.1-6 people, politics, and literary genre converge as three former characters come together in one narrative for the first time. Although Gehazi was previously commanded by Elisha to speak to the Shunammite, the narrative never depicts any direct speech between the two characters (cf. 4.12-13, 26). The interaction is only implied. It is always Elisha's, 'say to her', followed by her response.<sup>29</sup> Earlier narratives likewise indicate absolutely no contact between either the king and Gehazi, or the king and the woman. The king and the Shunammite are mentioned together, and only in passing,

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<sup>27</sup> Recall the structure noted by P. Buis, *Le livre des Rois*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 28: 'More than one passage gives clear evidence of another aspect of his work – politics; and this was very probably the real focal point of his whole life.'

<sup>29</sup> M. Shields, 'Subverting a Man of God, Elevating a Woman: Role and Power Reversals in 2 Kings 4,' *JSOT* 58 (1993) 59-69 (61) claims that Elisha does not speak directly to the woman in 2 Kgs 4 but instead, even in the announcements of vv.16 and 36, 'he uses Gehazi as a go-between.' We reject the assertion that Elisha does not speak to the woman while Gehazi does since it is actually the exact opposite of the textual portrayal. While it is true that Elisha commands Gehazi to call the woman, it is Elisha who speaks to her in the important announcements of the son's birth and his restoration (vv.16, 36). On the other hand, although it is appropriate to assume that Gehazi has spoken to the woman in vv.12, 13, 15, 36, as evidenced by later behaviour (e.g., 12b: 'And he called her and she stood before him'), there is, in fact, no direct speech between the woman and Gehazi. Thus, even in the meeting between Gehazi and the woman in 4.25, 26 we read only the words of Elisha and assume they were delivered by Gehazi.

with respect to the possibility that Elisha may speak to the king on her behalf (4.13). It is odd, to say the least, to have so much of the narrative focused on the restoration of life by Elisha, while the king speaks with Gehazi, a figure previously connected with greed and leprosy.

Ironically, Elisha does speak to the king in 8.1-6, albeit through the 'great thing' performed earlier for the Shunammite and her son. Although Elisha is absent, Gehazi assumes the role of tradent, re-telling not Elisha's 'great deeds' but only Elisha's 'great deed.'<sup>30</sup> Even in his absence Elisha can influence history in a manner similar to YHWH, who does not tell his deeds directly but has others perform the task for him. Like the Exodus event, the restoration of the Shunammite's son to life is reiterated as a focal point of prophetic glory as if all of the numerous earlier acts of Elisha could somehow be epitomised in this one great act. In his shock at the sudden presence of the subjects of his story, Gehazi addresses the king in a clause of poetic amazement emphasising woman, son, and prophet:

אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה וְזֶה בְּנֶהּ אֲשֶׁר הִחְיָה אֵלִישָׁע

'My lord the king, this is the woman and this is her son whom Elisha had restored to life' (v.5b).

Gehazi's address (אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ) was in an earlier narrative applied to the king of Israel at 6.26, in the similar context of a famine in which a woman is also 'crying out' to the king in an attempt to gain a legal hearing.<sup>31</sup> She was met by the despairing admission that there were no supplies available from either the winepress or

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<sup>30</sup> Cohn, 'Form and Perspective,' 171 notes the number of ways that Gehazi is portrayed in the Elisha stories from the 'loyal but insensitive' Gehazi of 4.8-37, to the 'rejected leprous Gehazi' of 2 Kgs 5, and finally Gehazi before the king in 2 Kgs 8. It is not uncommon for scholars to see in the retelling of Elisha's deeds evidence for the gathering of the 'cycle'. The comments of Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 88, are indicative of this view: '[T]hese few verses offer an unencumbered view of the creative process behind the Elisha cycle. His "great deeds" were retold (v.4) not only among the Sons of the Prophets,...but also at the court of Samaria (and Damascus, cf. 8:7).' See also Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 18. The story brings together an unlikely group of characters. Can we really consider this an 'unencumbered view of the creative process' when the story itself is part of the creative process?

<sup>31</sup> Boyce, *Cry to God*, 27 observes that in both 6.26-29 and 2 Kgs 8.1-6 a legal hearing is sought.

threshing floor (6.27). In our treatment of this verse we argued that judgment was implied in two ways. First, at a rather straightforward level, judgment was entailed in the actual emptiness of the winepress and the threshing floor. Secondly, taking these features as symbols of judgment, we find a king who describes himself in symbolic terms in the midst of the ‘winepress and the threshing floor’ of judgment.

Yet there are some noteworthy differences that may provide an explanation for the staging of disparate figures in 8.1-6. The request of the Shunammite is much less ambiguous than that of the woman in the prior story; her ‘crying out to the king’ (v.5a) has the return of home and field as a clear goal. The reply of despair by the king in the prior story is replaced by his attempt to confirm Gehazi’s words and the implied reiteration of the tale (וַיִּשְׁאַל הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאִשָּׁה וַחֲסֹפֶר לֹו, v.6a). The woman in 2 Kgs 6 is never assisted by the king in contrast with the present tale where the monarch actually responds to the needs of the complainant. The use of the participles in verse 8.5a emphasise the simultaneity of Gehazi’s ‘telling’ and the woman’s ‘crying out.’ This, along with the repeated אֲשֶׁר־הָחִיָּה, indicates a cause and effect relationship. The constellation of the king, Gehazi, and the Shunammite, leads to the royal recognition of Elisha’s great deed and ultimately issues in royal response to the woman’s cry, viz., the return of her belongings and ‘all the produce of the field’ (כָּל־תְּבוּאֹת הַשָּׂדֶה), v.6b).<sup>32</sup> For the first time in the Elisha narratives we find a king caring for one of his subjects but only as he publicly recognises prophetic actions.<sup>33</sup> YHWH’s opening of ‘windows of heaven’ and the provision of grain in the previous narrative contrasts

<sup>32</sup> J. Siebert-Hommes, ‘The Widow of Zarephath and the Great Woman of Shunem: a Comparative Analysis of Two Stories,’ in B. Becking and M. Dijkstra (eds), *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific & Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes*, BIS 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 231-250 (249 n.31) raises the possibility of the son as a metaphor for the sons of Israel given the presence of the seven-year famine and the sojourn in a foreign land (cf. Gen 41.30).

<sup>33</sup> In a prior story the king fed the Aramean army at Elisha’s command (2 Kgs 6.23). However, in 2 Kgs 3 and 2 Kgs 5 the king seems unaware of Elisha and in 2 Kgs 6.9 it is the prophet who takes the initiative. The response of individuals to prophetic actions is an important aspect of the Elisha stories. See T. W. Overholt, ‘Seeing is Believing: the Social Setting of Prophetic Acts of Power,’ *JSOT* 23 (1982) 3-31 (7, 21). Overholt notes that the king’s response in 8.6 goes beyond the woman’s request.

with the king's inability to provide from threshing floor and winepress. However, in 2 Kgs 8.1-6, in the absence of the man of God and YHWH, both land and produce are restored after an exile of seven years among the Philistines; however, this restoration is effected only when the monarch recognises the great deed of the prophet.

### 2 Kgs 8.7-15: Will I recover from this illness?

As noted previously, the question of restored life or at least renewed health is carried on in this penultimate story of the Elisha narratives.<sup>34</sup> It is not that Elisha happens to be in the neighbourhood at the time and can therefore be conveniently questioned. Instead the narrator gives the impression of a pro-active prophet setting events in motion and thus it is that we find him going to Damascus 'while Ben-Hadad king of Aram was ill' (וּבְיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ מִלְּדֹאֲרָם חֹלָה, v.7).<sup>35</sup> Although Elisha does not end up at the sick king's bedside, in the final Elisha tale we find an interesting reversal with a weeping king coming to visit a dying prophet (2 Kgs 13.14).

The story of 2 Kgs 8.7-15 is structured around three different scenes each involving Hazael, the future king of Damascus. The first and third scenes narrate the interaction with Ben-Hadad (vv.7-8, 14-15) which surround the central dialogue with Elisha (9-13).<sup>36</sup> In the first scene (vv.7-8) we learn of Elisha's location, Ben-Hadad's illness, and Hazael's quest(ion). The location of the prophet is a consistent concern for the king of Aram. In the prior instance of the phrase, וַיִּגְדֹּל לֵאמֹר, ('it was told to him saying,' v.7b), the issue was likewise Elisha's whereabouts and the answer was 'behold in Dothan' (6.13b). At that time Ben-Hadad sent his forces to surround the prophet. Now he is informed that 'the man of God has arrived right here'

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<sup>34</sup> Excluding the Elisha's brief instructions in 9.1, the final story is found at 2 Kgs 13.14-21.

<sup>35</sup> Williams §494 provides numerous examples of 'clauses describing concomitant circumstances' which are introduced by the ך of accompaniment. Niccacci, *Syntax*, 65 gives 8.7 as an example of *waw-x-qatal* interrupting the *wayyiqtol* chain to 'express a simultaneous circumstance.'

<sup>36</sup> Note, for example, the explicit movement toward Elisha (וַיִּגְדֹּל הַמֶּלֶךְ לְקָרְאָתוֹ, v.9) which begins scene 2 and movement away from him (וַיִּגְדֹּל מִמֶּנּוּ מֵאֵת אֶל־יָשָׁע, v.14) which commences scene 3.

(בָּא אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים עִרְ-הַנָּה) with a word order that need not detract from the divine status of the prophet.<sup>37</sup> In following the commands of the king of Aram to ‘go and inquire of YHWH from him,’ Hazael takes gifts to meet the man of God. Ben-Hadad must therefore expect to pay for the prophetic oracle such that Hazael takes the ‘gift in his hand,’ a gift more fully described as ‘all good things of Damascus, forty camel loads’ (v.9aβ).<sup>38</sup> Long notes that with the size of the gift and Hazael’s self-presentation, Elisha is granted ‘extraordinary status.’<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere in Kings the exchange of gifts between royalty is also borne by the camels of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10.2).

The primary goal of the meeting is the deliverance of the question, ‘Will I recover from this illness?’ The contrast is striking; whereas Ahaziah, king of Israel, sought from Ba‘al Zebub an answer to this question (2 Kgs 2.1), the Aramean, Ben-Hadad, seeks his answer from YHWH in similar language (2 Kgs 8.8, 9).<sup>40</sup> The theme of royal

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<sup>37</sup> While the observations which follow below are interesting, we do not wish to push them too forcefully into service and, as will be seen, we can only do so by coming in through the back door. J-M §155nd notes that at the beginning of statements we often find the subject followed by the verb (S-V). It is postulated that the V-S nature in texts like 2 Kgs 8.7b is due to the ‘reporting’ or news-like nature of the statement even though the verb בָּא ‘is quite common at the beginning of a clause’ (n.2, p. 582). Elsewhere in *Emphatic Words*, 35 Muraoka lists a number of examples with God or divine messenger as subject in the initial position (S-V) and provides a tentative explanation: ‘It is possible that in certain expressions with the divine name or a divine messenger as the subject, a kind of religious psychology in which God occupies the dominant place determines the arrangement of words giving S [subject] the initial position.’ And yet 2 Kgs 8.7b is V-S and therefore does not provide evidence for Elisha as a divine figure (note e.g., the S-V order at Judg 13.6: לְאִמֹר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים בָּא). However, the possible divine status of Elisha should not be abandoned too quickly since YHWH is the subject of all of Muraoka’s conflicting examples (Exod 5.21; Num 6.24, 25, 26; Ruth 1.8, 9) save 2 Kgs 8.7, where the subject is, of course, Elisha. This may go some way to explaining the Arameans surprise that one of Elisha’s stature would end up in Damascus.

<sup>38</sup> The distinction Bergen makes here between the words of Ben-Hadad and the gift Hazael actually takes, is unnecessary (*Elisha*, 156-57). Instead we would agree with the assessment of B. A. Mastin, ‘WĀW EXPLICATIVUM in 2 Kings VIII 9,’ *VT* 34 (1984) 353-55 and read וְכָל-טוֹב in וְכָל-טוֹב in epexegetically: ‘And he took a gift in his hand, that is all the best things of Damascus.’ On the issue of payment for prophecy see S. Shaviv, ‘NĀBĪʿ AND NAGĪD in 1 Samuel IX 1-X 16,’ *VT* 34 (1984) 108-113. He raises the possibility that the ‘word play nābīʿ-ḥēbīʿ may reflect a certain popular resentment against, even contempt for, beggar-like prophets, eager to accept any gift offered them’ (110). Recall that Naaman had expected to be healed for a price in 2 Kgs 5, however Elisha had explicitly rejected the gift later obtained by Gehazi.

<sup>39</sup> Long, *2 Kings*, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Polzin observes that after Rehoboam no king of Israel or Judah ‘seeks counsel.’ I thank A. G. Auld for bringing to my attention the treatment of the lexical distribution of דָּרַשׁ in R. Polzin, *David*

illness stands astride the greater portion of the Elisha stories and is associated with a confusion of royal names (2 Kgs 1.17; 8.23-25). The rhetorical strategy seems fairly clear: monarchs are ill and dying; the distinctions between heads of state of Israel and Judah are confused and confusing; non-Israelite kings seek YHWH while Israelite kings do not; and yet there is a prophet, here treated in royal fashion, whose ability to raise the dead was the central focus of the previous narrative.<sup>41</sup>

### 2 Kings 8.9-13: An Ambiguous Conversation

The gift itself fades from view as the bulk of the narrative space is dedicated to the second scene, the meeting of Elisha and Hazael (vv.9-13). At the narrative level, Hazael is a figure about whom we know very little. Elijah was told by YHWH to go to Damascus in order to anoint this figure along with Jehu and Elisha (1 Kgs 19.15-17). No doubt Elisha is to be anointed a ‘prophet in your place’ and yet he is grouped with soon-to-be royal figures. Having accomplished only the anointing of Elisha – and even this was not anointing in the strict sense of the word – we still await the anointing of Hazael by a prophetic figure. Instead of Elisha finding Hazael, the reader is informed of Hazael’s actions by means of a series of *wayyiqtol* verbs which reflect the prior commands of the king (וַיִּלְךְ... וַיִּקַּח... וַיָּבֵא... וַיַּעֲמֵד... וַיֵּאמֶר, v.9). The portrayal of command and immediate response is not unlike the Shunammite’s earlier reaction to the Elisha’s warning (vv.1-2).

Following up this line of thought, it is worth pausing a moment to consider wider narrative implications. Hazael wastes no time in stating the authority underlying his task and the purpose of his visit, informing the prophet that ‘your son...sent me to

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*and the Deuteronomist: a literary study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Part 2: 2 Samuel, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 173-75. Occurrences of דָּרַשׁ in Kings: 1 Kgs 14.5; 22. 5, 7, 8; 2 Kgs 1.2, 3, 6, 16, 3.11; 22. 13, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Hazael’s connection with kingly weakness is not inconsequential. In later portions of chapter eight, his forces are responsible for the wounding of Jehoram and indirectly for the emergence of Ahaziah of Judah into the narrative (2 Kgs 8.24-29).

you' (שְׁלַחְנִי אִלֶּיךָ... בְּנֶךְ, v.9b). Hazael can speak of Ben-Hadad as 'your son' only insofar as Elisha is considered 'his father'. Within Kings the syntagm בְּנֶךְ is used with reference to a monarch and his progeny (1 Kgs 5.19; 8.19; 11.12, 13) or as a term of deference from one monarch to another (2 Kgs 16.7) and so again we find Elisha portrayed in a royal manner.<sup>42</sup> J. R. Porter in his article 'בְּנֵי-הַנְּבִיאִים,' notes that the sons of the prophets more typically address Elisha as אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים or אֲדוֹן and themselves as עֲבָדִים. Porter claims that the portrayal of Elisha's succession to Elijah in 2 Kgs 2 'has been influenced by royal ideology and terminology.'<sup>43</sup> Royal ideology has however, moved beyond the confines of 2 Kgs 2 to influence the characterisation of Elisha in 8.7-15 as well.

One of the primary interpretative difficulties in this second scene concerns the highly ambiguous dialogue between Elisha and Hazael (vv.10-13), particularly vv.10-11. Hazael places Ben-Hadad's question firmly in Elisha's court with undeniable precision, delivering the query in the exact form with which it was entrusted to him (לְאֹמֵר הָאֲחִיָּה מִחֲלֵי זֶה), vv.8b, 9b). This is however, where the clarity ends.

The beginning of v.10 is straightforward as the narrator explicitly names 'Elisha' as the speaking subject. This unnecessary but helpful reminder that the subject has changed may have arisen from the fact that Elisha is not named in v.9, a pronominally loaded sentence. In order to make sense of v.9 the reader is heavily dependent upon Ben-Hadad's prior commands to Hazael. Nevertheless, our understanding of 'who does what to whom and in what manner' provides no real

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<sup>42</sup> Undoubtedly, father-son terminology is expected given the nature of the book of Kings. Interestingly, the 'sons of the prophets' never refer to Elisha as 'my father.' Elisha is called אָבִי only by monarchs (2 Kgs 6.21; 13.14), while Elisha himself uses it only of Elijah (2.12) and his biological father (1 Kgs 19.20). Besides Elisha, the term is used by one other non-royal figure of the military leader Naaman (2 Kgs 5.13). Otherwise, the morpheme, אָבִי, which reflects the other side of the phrase 'your son', is placed exclusively in the mouths of monarchs in the book of Kings.

<sup>43</sup> J. R. Porter, 'בְּנֵי-הַנְּבִיאִים,' *JTS* n.s.32 (1981) 423-29 (425). We have argued this earlier in our treatment of 2 Kgs 2.

difficulties in this verse. The potential ambiguities are muted by means of verbal,<sup>44</sup> clausal,<sup>45</sup> and even lexical repetition,<sup>46</sup> along with the clear pronominal references. We say that the mention of Elisha's name is 'unnecessary' because even if v.10 had begun, 'He said to him' rather than 'Elisha said to him,' the reader would intuit that the speaker was Elisha due to cohesion of the intervening verse and his initial mention in v.1. The importance of analysing the obvious becomes clear once we explore the content of Elisha's reply to Hazael, which is far from transparent.

לך אָמַר-לוֹ חַיָּה תִחְיֶה וְהָרָאֲנִי יְהוָה כִּי-מוֹת יָמוּת

'Go say to him, "You shall surely recover," and yet YHWH has caused me to see that he will surely die' (2 Kgs 8.10).

The first question concerns whether the *Ketib* (לא) or *Qere* (לו) reading is to be preferred. We accept the latter given its versional and MSS support.<sup>47</sup> Second, C. Labuschagne has argued that the words following אָמַר-לוֹ should be taken as indirect rather than direct speech. Whereas חַיָּה means 'recover' in vv.8 and 9, it means 'live' in v.10. Elisha is, according to this view, hinting that Hazael will 'live as king' but that Ben-Hadad will die. Along with this, לא־אֵמַר is lacking before Elisha's message in v.10, but present before the messages in vv.8 and 9. Labuschagne writes: 'The

<sup>44</sup> לקח and הלך (vv.8a, 9a)

<sup>45</sup> לקראת איש האלהים // לקראתו (vv.8a, 9a); מנקה בידו // בידך מנקה

<sup>46</sup> Note, for example, the use of דְּמִשְׁקָא in vv.7, 9. Although this location name is used in very different way in these two verses, knowing that Elisha is in Damascus, and that Hazael is bringing all the good things of Damascus, the reader brings the two together.

<sup>47</sup> The versions: LXX (αὐτῶ); Targ (ליה); Pesh (ל); LXX<sup>B</sup> omits αὐτῶ. According to Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 397, 18 MSS have לו. Several other observations argue against לא. First, if the negative is to be read, then 2 Kgs 8.10 provides the only instance in the MT where the *qal* imperative אָמַר is followed immediately by the negative particle לא, although several texts come close to this syntactical arrangement (Lev 21.1; Deut 1.42; Ezek 12.28; 36.22). On the other hand, positively, there are examples of this imperative followed by the inseparable preposition ל as in 8.10: (Gen 20.13; Deut 1.42; 1 Sam 9.27; 1 Kgs 18.8, 11, 14; 2 Kgs 4.26; Jer 13.18; Ezek 17.12; 22.24; 24.21; 28.2; 36.22; 39.17). Secondly, if אָמַר-לא is correct, then the element after the *maqef*, 'No!' is to be spoken as part of the commanded direct discourse. This is unusual since in every instance where the *maqef* is present it is followed either by אָנֹכִי, or, as noted above, by the inseparable preposition (See Even-Shoshan:90-91). The only other example of direct discourse immediately following the *maqef* (i.e., part of the commanded speech) is found at Ezek 6.11, but this is not without some minor textual problems (see BHS note). Finally, the negative followed by the infinitive absolute is somewhat uncommon: (Gen 3.4; Num 22.37; Ps 49.8; Qoh 5.19; Isa 58.7; Jer 3.1; 38.15; Amos 9.8.

narrator certainly would have used *לאמר* here too, if he had understood Elisha's message as direct speech.<sup>48</sup> Thus he considers v.10 to be indirect speech because it is unmarked by *לאמר*. The address to Hazael and the reference to Ben-Hadad, take place from the perspective of the speaker, Elisha: 'Go, say to him that you [Hazael] shall certainly live, and that Yahweh has shown me that he [Ben-Hadad] shall certainly die.'<sup>49</sup> This is attractive since Hazael's deliverance of the message in the nearly identical v.14 (*אמר לי יהיה תחיה*) must be viewed as unmarked indirect speech. However, two detailed studies on the subject of direct and indirect speech, call Labuschagne's interpretation into question.

S. Meier notes that indirect discourse may be found with *אמר* when it is introduced by *-ש*, *-אשר*, *-כי*, *-ו*, or no particle at all.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, C. L. Miller points out that indirect speech 'usually exhibits syntactic subordination of the quotation to the frame' although there may be no explicit subordination.<sup>51</sup> According to Labuschagne's interpretation, 2 Kgs 8.10 would fit into this latter category since there is no formal mark of subordination.<sup>52</sup> Maier challenges Labuschagne's assertion that the author

<sup>48</sup> C. J. Labuschagne, 'Did Elisha Deliberately Lie? – A Note on II Kings 8.10,' *ZAW* 77 (1965) 327-28 (328).

<sup>49</sup> Labuschagne, 'Did Elisha Lie,' 327. Labuschagne views this as an oracle but it is unclear whether he thinks that the entire message was to be delivered to Ben-Hadad (p. 328).

<sup>50</sup> S. A. Meier, *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible*, VTSups 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 66. Maier lists 2 Kgs 8.14 as an example of indirect discourse not introduced by one of these markers.

<sup>51</sup> C. L. Miller, 'Discourse Functions of Quotative Frames in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,' in W. R. Bodine, *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What it is and What it Offers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 155-82 (164). Miller lists these subordinating markers on page 161. By 'quotative frame,' she refers to 'the speech of the reporting speaker' and 'quotation refers to the speech of the reported speaker' (156n.3). Thus in 2 Kgs 8.10 *ויאמר אלי אֵלֵי אֵלֵי שָׁע* is the frame and Elisha's reported speech the quotation.

<sup>52</sup> Likewise Gen 12.13 has no mark of subordination yet must be taken as indirect speech since it is ridiculous to have Sarah saying 'You are my sister' to a group of Egyptians. See C. L. Miller, *Representation*, 121; Meier, *Speaking*, 66. On the other hand, Gen 20.13 also lacks the infinitive construct, *לאמר*, and yet Abraham reports to Abimelech direct speech which Abimelech himself had previously heard (Gen 20.5). There are several instances in Exodus where YHWH commands Moses 'Say to Aaron (X)' and one must assume that the command is then given directly from Moses to Aaron (Exod 7.19; 8.1, 12). Similarly Ezek 22.24 must be direct speech since it is not Ezekiel, but the land which is not cleansed.

would have used **לאמר** to mark direct speech in 2 Kgs 8.10 since, ‘it is exceptional for **לאמר** to accompany the root **אמר** before DD [direct discourse]. Not only does one not expect it, but when one finds **לאמר** following **אמר** one should be mildly surprised.’<sup>53</sup> While the infinitive construct, **לאמר**, is a clear marker of direct speech, it is also true that ‘direct speech without **לאמר** is far more common than direct speech with **לאמר**’ and thus the fact that it is missing in 2 Kgs 8.10 does not necessarily indicate indirect speech.<sup>54</sup> There are also analogous texts within the Elisha narratives which must be taken as direct speech.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, Labuschagne’s argument is not compelling. It is possible that the narrator would have used **לאמר** if direct speech was intended. But given the above discussion we may counter that indirect speech would have been made more explicit by the narrator. It is perhaps safer to assume direct speech even in this ambiguous text.<sup>56</sup> Labuschagne’s proposal that Hazael employed the ambiguity of the prophet’s *ipsissima verba* and deceived Ben-Hadad, knowing that Hazael himself was the subject of **הִיָּה תְּחִיָּה**, moves the apparent deception from Elisha to Hazael. But if Hazael could successfully exploit an ambiguity, why could Elisha not have done so? Also the decision to read ‘You shall certainly recover’ as ‘You shall live (*as king*)’ seems forced.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Meier, *Speaking*, 86n.5. He discusses the somewhat rare case of **לאמר...אמר** on pages 84-94.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, ‘Discourse Functions,’ 168. Meier, *Speaking*, 94 makes a similar point. It must be noted however, that Miller, challenges some of Meier’s conclusions with respect to **לאמר** (*Representation*, 170-71; 208-09).

<sup>55</sup> In 2 Kgs 4.13 we suspect that the message ... **אָמַר-נָא אֵלֶיָּה הִנֵּה תַרְדֵּת אֵלֵינוּ**, was to be delivered directly by Gehazi to the Shunammite. In 2 Kgs 4.26 Elisha commands Gehazi to run to the Shunammite ... **וְאָמַר-לָהּ הַשְּׁלוֹם לָךְ**. By her response it is appropriate to assume that the message was delivered as given.

<sup>56</sup> Another minor bit of evidence concerns the other instances of the syntagm **הִלֵּךְ** (impv) + **אמר** (impv) + **ל** (insep prep). These are found at Deut 5.30; 1 Kgs 14.7; 18.8, 11, 14. Each instance is followed by direct speech.

<sup>57</sup> Long, *2Kings*, 103 similarly concludes that Labuschagne’s overall argument; while grammatically possible, is ‘somewhat strained.’

## A Prophet Who Sees Like El

Prophetic vision is arguably the most important element in this story. We learn that YHWH 'has caused' Elisha to see Ben-Hadad's death (וַיִּרְאֵהוּ), just as YHWH has also caused Elisha to see Hazael's reign (וַיִּרְאֵהוּ יְהוָה אֶתֶּךָ מֶלֶךְ עַל-אַרְם) (v.13b). This repeated use of רָאָה is particularly interesting since few commentators have noted it in the context of Hazael's name. YHWH's agency in causing Elisha to see is emphasised even as the latter addresses Hazael – 'El has seen.'<sup>58</sup> This requires further consideration.

B. Margalit, after reminding his readers that the Aramaic name 'Hazael' is derived from the Aramaic word for 'see' (חזיה; Hebrew: רָאָה), comments that it 'preserves the connection of El with visionary prophecy.'<sup>59</sup> Barring one exception 'no dreams are recorded in the Pentateuch outside the book of Genesis, a book which is set in and describes the proto-historical era of El-worshipping Patriarchs. The one exception is the similar El-worshipping Aramean seer, Balaam bar-Beor in Num 22-24....'<sup>60</sup> It is therefore natural for El to be considered the source of dreams and nocturnal visions.<sup>61</sup> Given (1) this connection of El with dreams, (2) Margalit's belief that 'the historical Balaam' was 'a contemporary and Landsmann of Elijah the Gileadite',<sup>62</sup> and (3) the El-theophoric names 'Elijah' and 'Elisha', one wonders why neither prophet obtains prophetic insight by dreams. The significance of Hazael's name and the doubled use

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<sup>58</sup> HALOT 1:300 renders the name 'God has looked.' The name is spelled חזיאל in 1 Kgs 19.15, 17; 2 Kgs 8.9, 12; 9.14, 15; 10.32; 12.18(2x); 13.3(2x), 24, 25; 2 Chr 22.5 (note the parallel 2 Kgs 8.28 has plene spelling); Amos 1.4. The plene spelling חזיאל is found only in 2 Kgs 8 (vv.8, 13, 15, 28, 29 // 2 Chr 22.6).

<sup>59</sup> B. Margalit, 'Ninth-Century Israelite Prophecy in the Light of Contemporary NW-Semitic Epigraphs,' in M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper (eds.), *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf. Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift für Oswald Loretz* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 515-32 (526). This is not to say that חזיה is an Aramaic loanword. See W. M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period*, JSOTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 38.

<sup>60</sup> Margalit, 'Ninth-Century,' 523.

<sup>61</sup> Margalit, 'Ninth-Century,' 523-25. Margalit observes that in Ugaritic literature the connection of dreams with El is 'incontestable' (p. 524). See also p. 525 n.31 (Job 33.14-15) and p. 526 n.34 (Gen 31.10-13).

<sup>62</sup> Margalit, 'Ninth-Century,' 519. Such a statement is likely to be challenged.

of ראה for the present narrative is clear: both Elisha and El are able to ‘see.’ In spite of the fascinating possible connection of ninth-century Israelite prophecy with El, it is YHWH and not El, who is responsible for the prophet’s ability to see.<sup>63</sup> This theme persists indirectly in the highly ambiguous v.11:

וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶת־פָּנָיו וַיִּשֶׂם עַד־בֶּשׂ וַיִּבֶךְ אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים

And he fixed his gaze<sup>64</sup> and stared to the point of shame and the man of God wept.

One of the major difficulties concerns the determination of the subject of the two initial *wayyiqtol* verbs. The final verb וַיִּבֶךְ causes no problem since the weeping subject is the explicitly named man of God. However, with respect to the two initial *wayyiqtol* verbs it is not quite so easy. Are both actions to be attributed to Elisha, both to Hazael, or are the actions split between the characters? One may argue for Elisha as the subject of the first two verbs for several reasons. First, it is likely that if we were dealing with a change in subject, from the certainty of the speaking prophet at the end of v.10, to the staring Hazael at the beginning of v.11, the narrator would have made this more explicit. Note, for example, vv.9 and 10 immediately preceding. In v.9 Elisha is never mentioned by name; he is only referred to by means of an object suffix. In spite of the plethora of twists and turns within this verse, the reader easily intuits Hazael’s actions (cf. the explicit πρὸς Ελισαίε of the LXX at v.9). Nevertheless, the narrator makes an explicit subject change in v.10 (וַיֵּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֱלִישָׁע), although such a change is not really necessary since the speaker is clear from the context. It seems reasonable to assume that were Hazael the subject of the first verb in v.11, the narrator would have made a similarly explicit change. Secondly, one may argue that the phrase וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶת־פָּנָיו, as an action of Elisha, is being contrasted with

<sup>63</sup> The *hifil* perfect of ראה is found twenty six times in the MT and its subject is always YHWH except in 2 Kgs 20.13//Isa 29.2; 2 Kgs 20.15//Isa 39.4) where it is Hezekiah. The *hifil* perfect is not found at all in 1/2 Samuel which makes Elisha the only passive subject of YHWH’s action.

<sup>64</sup> BHS note: Pesh lacks the first sentence; LXX and Vulg read וַיַּעֲמֵד for וַיִּשֶׂם; 2 MSS are lacking וַיִּשֶׂם and, in view of the Vulg reading *et conturbatus est*, BHS suggests וַיִּשֶׂם (וַיִּשְׁמַם *to be desolated, appalled*, BDB:1030). Targum reads, וַיִּסְתַּח וַיִּתְּוֹוּ וַיִּתְּוֹוּ וַיִּתְּוֹוּ עַד כְּנִי (‘And he turned his face and waited for a long time,’ so Harrington and Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan*, 279).

Hazael's previous action, וַיַּעֲמֵד לְפָנָיו (v.9b).<sup>65</sup> The explicit mention of the 'man of God' at the end of v.11 could go either way. It may be viewed merely as a reminder that Elisha is the primary actor in the verse. Conversely, it may urge us to take Hazael as the subject of the earlier verbs. Why does man of God need to be clarified at verse's end if he is the clear subject of the prior verbs?<sup>66</sup>

### Why Does Elisha Cry?

The second major difficulty concerns the subject of the phrase עָרַב־בֵּשׁ.<sup>67</sup> It possible that either Elisha or Hazael is ashamed, or perhaps both. Besides Judg 3.25, the phrase is also found at 2 Kgs 2.17 where it is similarly ambiguous. Given the weeping of the man of God, which would certainly manifest itself facially, we would prefer to take Elisha as the subject of the first two verbs – also connected with facial actions, and allow עָרַב־בֵּשׁ to connote, more generally, the awkward social situation in which these characters find themselves.<sup>68</sup> Eventually Hazael inquires about the cause of Elisha's tears (v.12).

<sup>65</sup> Even if we reach a solid conclusion about the subject of the verb we are still left with the question of how to interpret the phrase וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶת־פָּנָיו which is the only occurrence of the *hifil* of עָמַד in 2 Kings (cf. other *hifil* occurrences 1 Kgs 12.32; 15.4). Gray, *Kings*, 531, holding the subject to be Elisha, claims that either he 'looked fixedly' at Hazael or 'that his features became rigid, as one in a trance experiencing second sight.' With either interpretation, Gray claims we have an unusual 'though not unintelligible' meaning for the *hifil*. HALOT 2:842 cites Gray's options with approval. The appropriate sense may be found in the conjunction of Hazael's name and Elisha's vision. In fact, given Elisha's comments, his present actions may actually foreshadow Hazael's later actions since the latter will 'set his face' (וַיִּשֶׂם הַזַּהָל פָּנָיו) to go up against Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12.18).

<sup>66</sup> Appealing to syntax, Provan, *Kings*, 208 takes Hazael as the subject of the entire verse up to and including עָרַב־בֵּשׁ: 'Hazael stared at him impassively to the point of embarrassment.'

<sup>67</sup> On the phrase עָרַב־בֵּשׁ see TLOT 1:204-207 (205); DCH 1:130-32 (131); NIDOTTE 1:621-27 (623). The phrase occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Judg 3.25; 2 Kgs 2.17; 8.11) with the sense of *unto shaming* (DCH 1:131), or '(to the point of) embarrassment' (TLOT 1:205). Hazael 'was therefore ashamed in the presence of Elisha by his dishonorable deliberations against Israel' (NIDOTTE 1:623). The verb בֹּשַׁת(I), *to be ashamed* is found in the Pentateuch only at Gen 2.25 and is rare in the Former Prophets (Judg 3.25; 2 Sam 19.6; 2 Kgs 2.17; 8.11; 19.26). The occurrences at Exod 32.1 and Judg 5.28 are בֹּשַׁת(II), *to delay, hesitate*. In the former sense it is found mostly in the Psalms and Prophets.

<sup>68</sup> It is also possible that Elisha, in recognition of the devastation Hazael will bring upon Israel, senses the oncoming humiliation of his people. Therefore the shame, viewed in a warfare context, is reflective of the shame the people of Israel will experience. On the use of shaming in a warfare see L. Bechtel, 'Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in biblical Israel: judicial, political, and social

Weeping monarchs are rare in the book of Kings. In 2 Kgs 13.14 Joash weeps, but note that even here Elisha is not far away; it is because of the prophet's imminent death that the king weeps. Hezekiah and Josiah weep at 2 Kgs 20.3 and 22.19 respectively. Therefore, in his weeping, the man of God is once again captured performing an act that elsewhere in the book of Kings is reserved for monarchs. Given the importance of the reforming kings Hezekiah and Josiah for Kings, it is significant that Elisha is again classed with these royal figures. Further, to this point, only Josiah and Elisha weep over the devastation to be brought upon the people.<sup>69</sup>

In response to Hazael's inquiry into the nature of his tears, Elisha provides a litany of the devastating acts which Hazael will soon bring upon the 'sons of Israel.' He replies:

כִּי־יָדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תַּעֲשֶׂה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רָעָה מִבְּצָרֵיהֶם תִּשְׁלַח בָּאֵשׁ וּבַחֲרִיבֵיהֶם בַּחֶרֶב תַּהַרְגֵנִי וְעַלְלֵיהֶם תִּרְטֹשׁ וְהָרַתִּיהֶם תִּבְקַע

'Because I know that you will do evil<sup>70</sup> to the sons of Israel: their fortifications you shall set on fire, and their young men with the sword you shall slay, and their infants you shall dash in pieces, and their pregnant women you shall split open' (2 Kgs 8.12b).

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shaming,' *JSOT* 49 (1991) 47-76 (63-67).

<sup>69</sup> The rarity of this is noted in *TLOT* 1:236-38 where Judg 2.4 and 2 Kgs 8.11 are cited in the observation that 'weeping plays a role in the relationship between God and human in only a few cases...' (p. 238). There are some noteworthy parallels with the De'ir Allā text. Margalit, 'Ninth-Century,' 516 states that the text is 'virtually contemporary with the chronological setting of the extensive prophetic narratives preserved in the Deuteronomistic Book of Kings pertaining to Elisha and his band of prophetic disciples living at the nearby oasis of Jericho and vicinity.' What is interesting about this proposed chronological proximity and the present text of 2 Kgs 8.7-16 is that Balaam, the 'visionary of the gods,' also weeps after receiving an 'oracle of doom.' Like Hazael, the people immediately ask Balaam why he is weeping. See Margalit, p. 528-29 for a transcription and translation.

<sup>70</sup> Gray, *Kings*, 529 n.(f) reads אָתָּה for רָעָה on the grounds that its position is 'very awkward' and 'wanting the definite article of the antecedent.' He renders it 'Because I know what you shall do to the sons of Israel.' However, there is no textual support for such a reading. The clause יָדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תַּעֲשֶׂה is found at Gen 9.24; 1 Sam 16.3; 28.2, 9; 1 Kgs 2.5, 9; 2 Kgs 8.12; Ezek 20.11. In the case of Gen 9.24; 1 Kgs 2.5, 9; 2 Kgs 8.12 the verb עָשָׂה is followed by ל marking an indirect object. None of these other verses provide a direct analogy by which to judge the appearance of רָעָה at the end of this clause in 2 Kgs 8.12, however, in several instances the phrase which follows עָשָׂה provides further information, describing the action to be done, or the action which has been done (e.g., 1 Sam 16.3; 28.9; 1 Kgs 2.5, 9). We prefer to take רָעָה as the object of the verb עָשָׂה rather than יָדַעְתִּי since the entire clause is the object of the latter verb. It may be that רָעָה is held out to the end of the clause in order to draw attention to the catalogue of destructive events which follows. See *BDB*:949 for further examples of עָשָׂה רָעָה at Gen 26.29; Judg 11.27; 15.3; 1 Sam 6.9; 2 Sam 12.18; 13.16; 1 Kgs 2.44; Jer 26.19; 41.11; 44.7.

The prior ambiguity fades. By means of these stereotyped phrases, Hazael's actions, when viewed within the broader context of Kings, portend the destruction which will befall Israel and Judah. In this way they stand as 'types' of disaster which later come upon both kingdoms. The particularly horrific crimes against women and children contrast with the previous story in which a woman and her family were not only spared but had their home and goods restored.<sup>71</sup> Of the four items listed by Elisha, the final three are found for the first time in the Hebrew Bible at 2 Kgs 8.12.<sup>72</sup> Elisha's weeping (בכה) is due to Hazael's splitting open (בקע), a deed foreshadowed in the earlier action of the bears in 2 Kgs 2.24 where the beasts tear (בקע) forty-two children. Of particular interest is Hosea 14.1b [Eng. 13.16] where, these three elements – destruction by the sword, dashing of the infant, and tearing of the woman with child – are all found in the context of Samaria's rebellion.

בְּחָרֶב יִפְּלוּ עַל־לִיָּהֶם יִרְטְשׁוּ וְהָרִיזוּתָיו יִבְקְעוּ

'...by the sword they shall fall, their infants shall be dashed in pieces and their pregnant women ripped open' (Hos 14.1b).

Overall Hosea 13-14.1b provides a variety of lexical and thematic connections similarly reflected in a wider view of the Elisha narratives. In our earlier treatment of 2 Kgs 2.23-25 we cited Hosea 13.8, which characterises YHWH as a bear bereft of cubs who will tear (בקע) the chest open. Hosea 13.9-11 then moves into a treatment of the monarchy as YHWH asks a question in Hos 13.10,

אֵהוּ מֶלֶכְךָ אֲפֹא וַיִּוָּשִׁיעֶךָ

'Where is your king now so that he may save you?' (Hos 13.10a).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Satterthwaite, 'Elisha Narratives,' 26.

<sup>72</sup> For example, the initial phrase is found only at 2 Kgs 8.12 however, שלח באש, is found at Judg 1.8; 20.48; Ps 74.7. Ironically in Amos 1.4, YHWH promises to 'send a fire on the house of Hazael and consume the citadels of Ben-Hadad' (cf. Amos 1.7, 10, 12; 2.2, 5; Ezek 39.6; Hos 8.14). Most occurrences of קָאֵשׁ in 2 Kings are associated with children 'passing through the fire' (16.3; 17.17, 31; 21.6; 23.10). We find the second phrase, הרג בחור חרב, *mutatis mutandis* at 2 Chr 36.17; Jer 18.21; Lam 2.21; Amos 4.10. For the third phrase עלל רטש see Isa 13.16; Hos 14.1 and Nah 3.10 (cf. Isa 13.18; Hos 10.14). Finally, בקע, הרה / הריה is found at 2 Kgs 15.16; Hos 14.1; Amos 1.13.

<sup>73</sup> See BHS on the textual problem. The final clause, בקל-עריך, is best read with the beginning of 10b.

which is not unlike that asked by Elisha early in the narratives:

אַיִהּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֵלִיָּהוּ אֶת־הוּא

'Where is YHWH God of Elijah now?' (2 Kgs 2.14).<sup>74</sup>

Unlike Hosea, Elisha mentions nothing of YHWH's help because he himself takes the king's place as representative of that help. Following on in Hosea, YHWH states that he removed the king 'in his wrath' (Hos 13.11). This removal of the king is likewise portrayed in the Elisha stories with its anonymous and weak monarch whose tasks are usurped by a prophetic upstart.

### A Critique of Monarchy?

But is there any indictment of kingship in the present story? The seemingly disconnected statements of Hazael and Elisha in verse 13 make an implicit yet strong statement against the actions of kings. Upon hearing Elisha's formulaic recital of the terrible deeds he will carry out upon Israel, Hazael makes his own formulaic 'self-abasement' statement:<sup>75</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲזַהְאֵל כִּי מָה עֲבַדְךָ הַכֶּלֶב כִּי יַעֲשֶׂה הַדְּבָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה

And Hazael said, 'What is your servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?' (2 Kgs 8.13a).

Hazael's 'great thing' (גדול) contrasts strongly with Elisha's 'great things' (גדלות) of the previous story. Given the fact that Elisha has provided a plurality of actions which Hazael will presumably perform, it is surprising that the narrator did not use גדלות here to describe Hazael's actions. He certainly could have done so provided the

<sup>74</sup> Here reading אֵלִיָּהוּ for אֵלִיָּהוּ. See Burney, *Notes*, 266 for a good survey of the options.

<sup>75</sup> G. W. Coats, 'Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas,' *JBL* 89 (1970) 14-26. This formula is found in the Lachish and Amarna letters as well (pp.15-16). Coats argues that there is really one formula used either in first person for self-abasement, or second and third person for insult, (p.19). The formula has two elements. The first is composed of a nominal sentence introduced by an interrogative (usually מָה or מִי) and followed by a personal pronoun, proper name or noun which functions as a circumlocution for personal pronouns or proper names (e.g., in 2 Kgs 8.13 *your servant* and *the dog*) The second part of the formula is a verbal sentence introduced by כִּי or less frequently אֲשֶׁר or *wayyiqtol* plus *yiqtol* (Coats, 14-15).

masculine *רבר* was removed. Perhaps this lends some support to the prior argument that *גדלות* is a theologically weighty term and thus could not be used here.

But what is the point of Hazael's response and does it speak to Elisha's royal portrayal? According to Coats, the initial element of the formula (the nominal sentence introduced by the interrogative particle) carries with it the basis for the conclusion found in the second element of sentence, and so is really an implied answer. As a statement, Hazael is pronouncing himself incapable of the actions Elisha attributes to him: "I should not do this great thing because I am your servant, the dog."<sup>76</sup> With respect to Elisha's royal characterisation we note the proposed setting for the some instances of this self-abasement formulaic expression.<sup>77</sup> According to Coats 'we can define one primary setting more precisely: royal court speech.'<sup>78</sup> In the Hebrew Bible the royal court setting is most clear in 1 Sam 18.18 and 2 Sam 9.8. In other places, rather than an address to the king, the king uses it of himself (2 Kgs 7.18; 2 Chr 2.5b). It is instructive to see how Coats attempts to draw the recalcitrant 2 Kgs 8.13 in line with this royal court setting:

II Kings 8 13 places the formula in the mouth of Hazael, the military leader for the king of Syria. With a third person circumlocution for first person in element *a*, the formula represents a response; not by a king about himself, or by any other member of the royal court. It is addressed to Elisha. But the prophet has just announced that Hazael is to lead a coup against the current king and make himself the new king in Syria.<sup>79</sup>

We would strongly disagree. In order to bring royalty into this, and thus make the formula meet his 'court setting', Coats has leapt ahead in the story. Elisha has 'just announced' only a list of destructive actions that Hazael will undertake, nothing more. Hazael's statement comes prior to Elisha's mention that he will be king, not

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<sup>76</sup> Coats, 'Self-Abasement,' 18.

<sup>77</sup> Coats, 'Self-Abasement,' 15. The formulaic structure also is found in five Lachish letters and twenty-five Amarna letters. See p. 15 nn. 4-5 for occurrences within particular letters.

<sup>78</sup> Coats, 'Self-Abasement,' 19. The other context, according to Coats, is the cult where it is used of the self-presentation of the worshipper to God (p. 22). All instances in the Amarna letters which have first and third person references in the first element of the formula are addressed to a king or his official.

<sup>79</sup> Coats, 'Self-Abasement,' 20.

after, and in fact, as we will see, Elisha makes no mention of Hazael leading a coup. Yet Coats does not need to get ahead in the narrative in order bring 2 Kgs 8.13 in line with his proposed royal setting if, as we suggest, Elisha is once again being given a royal characterisation. Hazael speaks to him in courtly language appropriate to his perceived status.

Elisha's final reply to Hazael provides closure to their conversation:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלִישָׁע הֲרֵאֵנִי יְהוָה אֲתָךְ מֶלֶךְ עַל-אַרָם:

And Elisha said, 'YHWH has caused me to see you king over Aram' (2 Kgs 8.13b).

The prophet here gives no indication that a coup is about to take place or that Hazael should lead one. These words do, however, implicitly indict kingship. In response to Hazael's, 'how can I do this great thing,' Elisha answers, 'I have seen you king over Aram.' Implicit point: you may not now imagine yourself capable of such dire actions as I have described, but as king you will be capable. Elisha's speech also serves to make a subtle connection between Hazael and the death of Ben-hadad, a connection which enables us to handle the final ambiguity of this story and answer the question, 'Who killed Ben-Hadad?'

The murder/suicide of Ben-Hadad is as shrouded in mystery as the supposed covering (מִכְבֵּר) that killed him. The story comes to a rapid conclusion with the succession of six *wayyiqtol* verb forms in v.15 and yet, lacking any explicitly named subjects, it is as ambiguous as v.11. In each case, in fact, the ambiguous verse follows statements which were intended to clarify the uncertainty about Ben-hadad's future; and each follows, in relatively close proximity, Elisha's claim that 'YHWH has shown me.' The lack of a named subject makes it possible for us to see Ben-Hadad as the one who to takes the מִכְבֵּר, dips it in water, and spreads it upon his own face, thus dying accidentally. However, the fact that YHWH has shown (הֲרֵאֵנִי, vv.10, 13) Elisha both the death of Ben-Hadad and the kingship of Hazael, implicates Hazael in the death of Ben-Hadad. So it is that 'Hazael reigned in his place.'

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION: GENRE, COHERENCE, AND NARRATIVE FUNCTION IN THE ELISHA NARRATIVES

The whole Elisha Cycle seems a foreign intrusion in the book. Pfeiffer, for once, is right in calling it 'an artificial literary product' rather than one 'to have been handed down by oral tradition'. Its message – religious, national or social – is practically nil and why it was included in the book is a problem that still has to be solved.<sup>1</sup>

Full realization of what the message is can be attained only by attentive and perceptive examination of the single piece of art.<sup>2</sup>

#### Genre, Oral Tradition and Deuteronomistic Integration

Radday and Rofé have provided some encouragement for the present attempt to determine the 'message' of 2 Kgs 2-8 as 'a single piece of art'. We argue that the collection of stories serve the larger story in which they are placed and do not exist merely for their own sake.<sup>3</sup> This study began with G. Jones' observation that the gathering of the Elisha stories into one collection provides only a minimal amount of surface unity. Certainly the diversity of the material and its paratactic construction are apparent. Yet it must be remembered that genre designations, particularly with respect to ancient Near Eastern stories about prophets, are etic (non-native) scholarly constructs. While the categories of *Sage*, *Legende*, and historical narrative, have continued play a prominent role in the classification of these stories, the borders between these are not easily maintained.<sup>4</sup> This does not imply that they are not useful nor does it follow that the presence of genre diversity in the Elisha stories must lead necessarily to the imposition of incoherence. McKenzie has noted with respect to the DtrH that any reasonable reconstruction of its formation must come to terms with

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<sup>1</sup> Y. Radday, 'Chiasm in Kings,' *Linguistica Biblica* 31 (1974) 62-67 (63). Radday refers to R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York/London: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 407.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rofé, 'The Classification of the Prophetic Stories,' *JBL* 89 (1970) 427-40 (440).

<sup>3</sup> See the comments of T. Collins, *Mantle*, 126.

<sup>4</sup> For a concise and balanced view of the etic/emic debate as well as the question of 'clear-cut genres' see S. K. D. Stahl, 'Narrative Genres: A Question of Academic Assumptions,' *Fabula* 21 (1980) 82-87.

both unity and diversity.<sup>5</sup> The present study is not focused on providing a reconstruction of the tradition history of the Elisha stories, a task already undertaken by a number of others. Instead, it focuses upon the ‘interdependence’ of the stories within the northern prophetic narratives and more widely within the Hebrew Bible in order to redress the imbalance of studies that focus on diversity. It is this ‘interdependence’ which encourages the view that the northern prophetic narratives were introduced into the book of Kings as a group.<sup>6</sup> It is common to maintain that the Elisha narratives comprise a previous circulating collection of folktales, or cycle, maintained and transmitted among prophetic circles or guilds. This may or may not be so. It is difficult to discern which traditions were transmitted orally once given a written text.<sup>7</sup> It is also difficult to sustain the idea of prophetic guilds or schools. Campbell’s ‘Prophetic Record’, for example, is criticised for its reliance upon such schools. McKenzie claims that both ‘schools’ and the question of genre are a problem for Campbell’s thesis.<sup>8</sup> Genre, oral tradition, and prophetic schools are not addressed as the primary focus of this thesis. Rather, these matters are addressed because of their relationship to the presumed promulgation of the Elisha stories and

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<sup>5</sup> S. L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, VTSup 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 19.

<sup>6</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 99 n.24. McKenzie makes a number of observations on the interconnections between the Elijah and Elisha stories. Contra Stipp, *Elischa*, he writes: ‘The interrelationship of the narratives renders any attempt to establish a *catena* of independent insertions too complex to be convincing.’ Evaluation of T. L. Brodie’s proposal (*The Crucial Bridge*, p. x) that the Elijah-Elisha narratives stand as ‘distillation of the Primary History’ on the one hand, and a ‘literary model for the Gospels’ on the other, requires more than time and space allow at present. However the idea that these narratives ‘constitute a key bridge between the foundational narratives of Judaism and Christianity’ (p. vii.) may lend indirect support to McKenzie’s comments particularly as Brodie is concerned with the unity rather than diversity of the Elijah-Elisha accounts. See especially *Crucial Bridge*, 1-27. With respect to the relative date of composition, Becking makes a good argument that the stories concerning Elisha were prior to the DtrH due to the presence of magic elements within them: ‘At the point when the Elisha cycle was embedded in the larger historical work, the tradition concerning Elisha had such authority that it was taken over without change... They were seen as an authoritative tradition’ (“Touch for Health,” 52).

<sup>7</sup> It is unlikely that folklorists would be happy with the contrast Pfeiffer set up between an artificial literary product and oral tradition (cf. the opening quotation).

<sup>8</sup> McKenzie, *Trouble*, 14.

as such they play a part in how the stories are viewed.<sup>9</sup> Examples of this are found in scholarly assessments of the DtrH which tend to exclude the narratives because they are neither edited nor integrated into it. But if we exclude them before making the attempt to examine whether or not they are integrated how do we know that they are not integrated? This led us to pursue the question of coherence in more depth.

### Coherence, Collage, and Bankrupt Metaphors

The increase in the use of the term 'coherence' in biblical studies is clear. What is not always so clear is how one is to understand the use of the term. In our examination in chapter two we determined that coherence is indeed the product of the reader's interaction with the text and not merely a feature of the text. With some texts one must work much harder than with others in order to produce a coherent reading. Elisha certainly requires a great deal more effort in this regard than, for example, the Succession Narrative. So it is that Kings has not received a great deal of attention from a so-called literary approach although this lacuna is rapidly being filled, particularly with respect to the Elisha narratives.

The production of coherence requires both contextualisation and the formulation of an overarching 'global intention' by which the parts can be assessed in relation to the whole. The latter corresponds to what van Wolde has called 'the reader's mental activity of representation.'<sup>10</sup> The paratactic construction of the Elisha stories does not require that one story be causally related to the next. Indeed it is clear that the Elisha stories move only in a broadly chronological fashion from Elisha's 'call' in 1 Kgs 19.19-21, to his succession to Elijah in 2 Kgs 2, to his illness and death in 2 Kgs 13.14-22.<sup>11</sup> Modern views of coherence are often based upon the need for causal

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<sup>9</sup> The shared concerns of genre and coherence are noted by Dry, 'Approaches to Coherence,' 484, who claims 'genre recognition is dependent in [*sic*] the reader's sense of the global coherence of one kind of text versus that of another kind of text.' See also Berge, *Reading Sources*, 181: 'A reader's experience of a text's unity also depends on *his expectations about genre*' (author's emphasis).

<sup>10</sup> E. van Wolde, 'The Creation of Coherence,' *Semeia* 81 (1998) 159-74 (169).

<sup>11</sup> We may also add 2 Kgs 8.7-15 and the introduction of Hazeal into the story. Collins, *Mantle*, 23

relationships requiring 'first things first' in a narrative presentation. Such a linear and causal conception of coherence applied rigidly to the Elisha stories will bring disappointment. Texts may be arranged causally, but there are other relations as well (e.g., collection, response, comparison, description).<sup>12</sup> However, this is not the same as saying that the narrative order of these tales is irrelevant. The individual stories within 2 Kgs 2-8 do not simply provide information about particular external referents, but in their present collective shape are 'regarded as an apparatus for the *production of meaning*.'<sup>13</sup> The placement and order of both the individual stories, as well as the wider grouping of Elisha narratives within Kings, does matter. Were we to mix the stories in a hat, pull them out at random, stick them back together and re-settle them between 2 Kgs 1 and 2 Kgs 9 we would then have a different textual organism and hence a different meaning. White continues, 'It follows that to change the form of the discourse might not be to change the information about its explicit referent, but it would certainly change the meaning produced by it.'<sup>14</sup> We have argued therefore, that 2 Kgs 2 is programmatic and that the question of 2 Kgs 2.14,

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notes that in the artificial arrangement of the material the literary concerns supersede the historical considerations.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnie J. F. Meyer and G. Elizabeth Rice, 'The Interaction of Reader Strategies and the Organization of Text,' *Text* 2 (1982) 155-92 (157).

<sup>13</sup> H. White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,' *History and Theory* 23 (1984) 2-32 (19). White argues for a '*performance model of discourse*' [his emphasis] which illuminates both the multi-layered aspect of discourse as well as its capacity 'bear a wide variety of interpretations.' The view that many of these stories take their present form because they were formerly oral tales does not answer the question of the production of meaning in their present form. T. H. Rentería, 'The Elijah/Elijah [sic] Stories: A Socio-cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century B. C. E. Israel,' in R. Coote (ed.), *Socioliterary Perspective*, 75-176 states: 'Why such hill-country oral traditions depicting the lives and realities of village people and their local heroes were incorporated into state legitimation narratives about central kings and elites is an intriguing question' (p. 76). Once again, albeit indirectly, the question of narrative function resurfaces. While the question is indeed intriguing, the assumption of their origination as 'hill-country oral traditions' and their present setting within 'state legitimisation narratives' is less certain. The present thesis provides one possible answer to this question.

<sup>14</sup> White, 'Question of Narrative,' 19. Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 10 makes a related point when he writes 'The message emerges from what happens among stories rather than from the individual stories themselves.' Here he is summarising the arguments of C. Lévi-Strauss's essay 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967).

'Where is YHWH God of Elijah?' is resolved in the stories which follow: YHWH is present (and re-presented) in a unique way in the person of Elisha. This is particularly relevant since there is no direct speech of YHWH within the Elisha narratives. The 'Elisha-like-YHWH' portrayal was perhaps most dramatically observed at the other end of the Elisha stories in the 'great things' of 2 Kgs 8.1-6.

We have argued not only for a 'divine' portrayal of the prophet, but for a royal one as well, since Elisha occasionally behaves in fashion more befitting a king. The work of T. Collins was helpful to us in this regard. He argued for a composite literary image or 'prophetic metaphor' which replaced a 'bankrupt royal metaphor' that once unified the king and people: 'Prophet and people are united in one symbolic figure, just as monarch and people were fused into one according to the royal metaphor.'<sup>15</sup> Elisha's work and solidarity with the sons of the prophets point in this direction. Collins also proposed the model of 'collage' as appropriate for the composition and redaction of prophetic literature.<sup>16</sup> 'Collage' is in fact an apt model for reading the Elisha narratives since the model serves our purposes in four respects. First, it recognises the diversity of the material present. Second, related to this, it reflects the paratactic construction of that material. Third, it is conducive to the construction of coherence from disparate images (van Wolde's 'mental representation'). Finally, it accommodates a wide variety of interpretative perspectives.

Bringing together the idea of a 'prophetic metaphor' replacing a 'bankrupt royal metaphor' and the reading model of collage, we note that observations about Elijah are even more applicable to Elisha. Collins comments that 'by literary analysis it is possible to observe how the composite and artificial picture of Elijah as the typical prophet is progressively built up by the writer, and that every successive anecdote

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 180. Elsewhere Collins calls this the 'literary process of image-building' (p. 125). Collins relies on the work of N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 87-88.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 29.

contributes something to the picture.<sup>17</sup> In this way Elisha is more of a mosaic prophet than a Mosaic prophet. In Elisha the metaphor is mixed and the image shifting since he is portrayed in ways prophetic, royal, and divine. While sharing Linville's reluctance to address provenance and historical context for Kings, the representation of Elisha outlined above would answer the need for a prophetic voice as well as the promise of a royal and divine presence, which would be acute in an exilic setting.<sup>18</sup>

### *Putting Elisha in His Place: the Narrative Function of 2 Kings 2-8*

It remains for us to examine the wider scope of Kings and the Former Prophets in order to put Elisha in his place. W. Bergen claims that Elisha is presented in a manner which provides no real threat to the monarchy. Although an individual bearing the title of 'prophet' is expected to confront king or people, Elisha does neither. He does not address the people, send messages to kings regarding appropriate conduct, confront prophets of other gods or false prophets of his own god, or link healing and death to obedience and disobedience respectively.<sup>19</sup> Instead he 'goes about, or rather sits at home, performing miracles in the name of the silent Yahweh.'<sup>20</sup> Elijah can mount a direct challenge to the monarchy because he is a loner. Elisha, on the other hand, cannot since he is more integrated into Israelite society. Because he is a part of the society he provides us with a model of how a non-monarchic system might work. If Elisha provides a direct challenge to the king's power and establishes an alternative system of power, it may be read as a challenge to the monarchy itself and, according to Bergen, the text will not allow this to happen.<sup>21</sup> Because of this 'Elisha is a prophet with no message.'<sup>22</sup> Bergen concludes:

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<sup>17</sup> Collins' *Mantle*, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Linville, *Israel*, 301. Note the comment of Halpern and Vanderhooft, 'Editions,' 179: '[I]n detail, there is little agreement on the provenance of even the most fundamental elements of DtrH'.

<sup>19</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 135.

<sup>20</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 136.

<sup>21</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 136.

If Elisha continues to admonish and even threaten the kings, then prophetic power might be read as a real political alternative to monarchic power. Neither option is acceptable. The kings of Israel must be humbled, but the prophets need to be put in their place. This place is one of largely cooperative subordination to monarchic power.<sup>23</sup>

The present study has heeded Bergen's advice and made some attempt to put Elisha 'in his place.' Unlike Bergen, however, we do not believe that the place entails the subordination of prophetic to monarchic power, nor usurpation of monarchic power by prophetic power. Rather, the prophet is portrayed performing monarchic tasks because the monarch has abandoned that role: the prophetic metaphor is replacing the royal metaphor. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that we agree with Bergen that there is a 'prophetic alternative.' Where Bergen argues that Elisha has no message we argue that that Elisha himself is the message. We agree that the king is 'repeatedly characterized as weak and ineffective, while the prophet can bring victory, healing, and even life.'<sup>24</sup> What are the implications of this? Prophetic action, monarchic inaction, and the sociological and literary context in which those actions are placed must be considered as much as what is or is not spoken.

### The Prophetic King or a Kingly Prophet

Roland de Vaux in discussing the person of the king among ancient Israel's civil institutions, highlights the role of king – not prophet – as saviour. However, the

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<sup>22</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 136.

<sup>23</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 137. One wonders how Elisha's role in the anointing of Jehu fits in with the idea that the prophet offers no real challenge to the monarchy. In his recent work *Elisha and the End of Prophetism*, JSOTSup 286 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 162-66 Bergen addresses this question by observing that Elisha disappears from the narrative which returns us to the 'world of Elijah' (p. 165). He also claims that the 'world of Elisha does not fit with the world of Elijah or the rest of the world of Genesis-2 Kings' (p. 164). The point is that Elisha comes upon the stage to counter Baalism (1 Kgs 19.17) and yet we have heard nothing of Baalism or the 'long-forgotten characters' of Elijah's world for quite some time (p. 164). Bergen observes the surprising absence of Jezebel in the Elisha corpus (p. 165); however, we have argued at a number of places that Ahab and Jezebel are not far from the narrative surface.

<sup>24</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 131.

activities described in his treatment are surprisingly close to the activities performed by Elisha. De Vaux comments: 'The king is *ipso facto* a saviour. It is a common idea among primitive peoples that the king embodies the good estate of his subjects: the country's prosperity depends on him, and he ensures the welfare of his people.'<sup>25</sup> The king brings about the restoration of property, feeds the hungry, provides drink for the thirsty, heals the ill, and sets the captive free. Even the birthing of children is attributed to the power of the king.<sup>26</sup> According to J. Day, the king's task (in the Old Testament) was to 'protect the interests of widow and orphan, the poor and the needy.'<sup>27</sup> This is so in other ancient near Eastern contexts as well. Day notes, for example, a similar 'ideal of kingship' found in the Ugaritic epic texts of Keret and Daniel. We find that Daniel, 'raised himself up (and) sat at the entrance of the gate, among the mighty men who were by the threshing-floor; he judged the cause of the widow, he tried the case of the orphan.'<sup>28</sup> In concluding, de Vaux writes: 'Just as in former times the Judges had been "saviours" (Jg 3:9, 15), so under the monarchy the king delivered the nation from its enemies (2 S 19:10); he was a "saviour" (2 K 13:5), whom men called to their aid (2 K 6:26).'<sup>29</sup> Yet in 2 Kgs 6.8-23 and 6.24-7.20 the monarch is unable to fulfil this role. With respect to de Vaux's examples, the king in 6.26 is at a loss to know how to help. As for 2 Kgs 13.5, there is debate concerning the מוֹשִׁיעַ since the text is silent with respect to the figure's identity.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 110. For similar statements on the king's responsibility in caring for the oppressed see S. Mowinckel's treatment of Ps 72 in *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 1, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 68-69.

<sup>26</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 110-11.

<sup>27</sup> J. Day, 'The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy,' in J. Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 72-90 (86-88).

<sup>28</sup> Day, 'Canaanite Inheritance,' 86. Day cites *KTU*<sup>2</sup> 1.17.V.6-8 (Daniel) and *KTU*<sup>2</sup> 1.16.VI.43-50 (King Keret).

<sup>29</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 111.

<sup>30</sup> For the numerous suggestions offered regarding the identity of the unnamed figure see Gray, *Kings*, 594-95; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 167; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 143; Wiseman, *Kings*, 240; Linville, *Israel*, 179-80.

While far from explicit, Elisha fits the role of the unnamed 'saviour' in our interpretation particularly given his name and the fact that Elisha, rather than one of the kings, performs the kingly functions de Vaux highlights.<sup>31</sup> Non-royal healers and saviours throughout the Eastern Mediterranean possess charisma which the king lacks. This is one of the conclusions of Grottanelli's wide ranging study. He writes:

First of all, our healers all possess *charisma*: the *charisma* kings have lost, as we suggested, and a *charisma* that is badly needed in times of crisis such as those they are placed in. This charismatic quality consists of the charismatic persons' special relationship with the supernatural, and this relationship is expressed very concretely, by the working of miracles.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, this raises the question of the kind of crisis which is portrayed in 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13.

There appears to be a gap between a king who cares for his people and the actual presentation of the Omrides. In his sociological study, M. Chaney argues that in a bid for political stability Omri had returned to a 'Solomonic model for society' and to policies that, like Solomon's, were ultimately detrimental to the life of his people.<sup>33</sup> As David and Solomon concentrate power in Jerusalem, so Omri and Ahab centre the capital of Israel in Samaria. Under Solomon, the twin burdens of taxation and corvée fall heavily upon the north (cf. 1 Kgs 4.7-19). Rehoboam continues to lay heavy burdens upon the people which leads to outright rebellion against the house of David (1 Kgs 12.13-19). Like Solomon, Omri and Ahab acquire and maintain a large base of chariots.<sup>34</sup> The plight of the peasantry is at least as difficult and arguably worse under the Omrides when compared with Solomon.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Note the comments by A. Berlin, *Poetics*, 136 who claims that suggestion is often more convincing than detailed portrayal.

<sup>32</sup> Grottanelli, 'Healers,' in Bianchi and Vermaseren, *La Soteriologia*, 662.

<sup>33</sup> M. Chaney, 'Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy,' *Semeia* 37 (1986) 53-76 (71-72). See also Rentería, 'Stories,' in R. Coote (ed.), *Socioliterary Perspective*, 87-95, 114-15. Rentería takes up and develops some of Chaney's ideas concerning social dynamics.

<sup>34</sup> Chaney, 'Systemic Study,' 71. As evidence Chaney cites the figures given by Shalmanesar III (*ANET*<sup>3</sup>: 278-79) from the battle Qarqar where it is claimed that Ahab showed up with 2000 chariots. With respect to the building of a large military force and fortifications, Chaney's more general sociological conclusions are supported by the archaeological work of D. Ussishkin, 'Jezreel, Samaria

In the case of these miracle stories, famine, foreclosure, and death stalk the constituency presupposed like spectres. Peasants forced to the brink by the systemic conditions delineated above had been pushed into the void when natural disaster struck in the form of an extended and severe drought.<sup>36</sup>

The 'miracle' stories of Elijah and Elisha reflect these problems with the appearance of their 'stereotyped characters'.<sup>37</sup> Who fills the gap between these characters and the king?

While certain characters are stereotyped, Elisha as a figure is as enigmatic as the stories in which we find him: prophetic in title (1 Kgs 19.16; 2 Kgs 3.11; 5.3, 8, 13; 6.12; 9.1, 4), prophetic, kingly, and divine in presentation.<sup>38</sup> The narrative complexity of the Elisha narratives in particular and Kings in general will not allow a view that envisions Elisha replacing kings, or sees his portrayal as that of an ideal royal figure. However, if monarchs in the book of Chronicles can have prophetic characteristics, can prophets in book of Kings have royal features?<sup>39</sup> This is a question that will require further investigation.<sup>40</sup>

### Transition, Identity, and Anonymity

In view of the broader movement towards exile portrayed in Kings with the concomitant loss of land, and keeping in mind both the narrative reminders of Joshua

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and Megiddo: Royal Centres of Omri and Ahab,' in J. A. Emerton (ed.), *IOSOT Congress Volume*, Cambridge 1995, VTSup 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 351-64 (362).

<sup>35</sup> Chaney, 'Systemic Study,' 72.

<sup>36</sup> Chaney, 'Systemic Study,' 72.

<sup>37</sup> Chaney, 'Systemic Study,' 72.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 138 observes that Elisha is not portrayed in very 'clear lines' and so 'his literary character is much more complex and elusive than that of Elijah.' The verse citations point to examples where Elisha is called אֵלִישָׁה either directly or indirectly.

<sup>39</sup> See W. Schniedewind, *Word of God in Transition*, 190-93. It remains a debated point whether or not the Davidic kings in the book of Chronicles play a prophetic role. Schniedewind argues that they do not. However, those with whom Schniedewind disagrees observe prophetic features with respect to the Davidic ruler generally (Blenkinsopp), or Hezekiah in particular (Begg and Newsome). We do not wish to join this particular debate but only to raise the possibility that if kings can manifest prophetic features, and there are some scholars willing to argue the point, why could prophets not do the opposite?

<sup>40</sup> This question may be asked not only for prophetic portrayal in Kings but also elsewhere.

(1 Kgs 16.34; 2 Kgs 2) and the fact that Elisha is the final prophet to the north within Kings (cf., 2 Kgs 14.25), we place Elisha in a transitional role like that of Joshua.

R. Nelson, in his discussion of the crossing of the Jordan by Elijah and Elisha observes that ‘the two cross the Jordan on the “dry ground” of the exodus and conquest (v.8; Exod. 14:21; Josh. 3:17; 4:18), *reversing history as it were.*’<sup>41</sup> Joshua’s activity occurs during Israel’s transition into the land while Elisha’s activity transpires during the commencement of Israel’s expulsion.<sup>42</sup> The land first given to Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh (Num 32; Deut 3.12-20; Josh 13), with its location בְּעֶרְבוֹת מוֹאָב (Josh 13.32), is explicitly mentioned as the very land first taken away by YHWH through the agency of Hazael (2 Kgs 10.32-33).<sup>43</sup> After his acquisition of Elijah’s mantle, Moab is the first military challenge facing Elisha and the Jehoram/Jehoshaphat union (2 Kgs 3). The reader is informed twice – once as each son of Ahab accedes to the throne – that Moab rebelled against Israel following Ahab’s death (2 Kgs 1.1; 3.5). It is Moab and not some other foe which could have been selected because of the picture being painted for us. Israel is losing its grip on the land; and Moab, being among its first adversaries after leaving Egypt, is among the first to return as the narrative prepares us for Israel’s exile. Apart from Solomon’s

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<sup>41</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 158 (emphasis added). Nelson argues that the two move to a mysterious place ‘back in time and out of the land’ and that Elisha, crossing back over the Jordan alone re-enters the ‘ordinary world’ of Jericho, Bethel, etc. Bergen, ‘Alternative,’ 134-35 holds that the narrator has moved us outside of history as we normally perceive it and into ‘some sort of never-never land, where kings are unimportant’. Given the oddity of the regnal formulae fore and aft these narratives, it appears that the notion of a journey back in time does not end when Elisha ‘re-enters’ the land.

<sup>42</sup> It must be kept in mind that we are addressing narrative portrayal in this discussion. Recall that the relationship of Elisha’s activity to the reigns of particular kings in Israel’s history remains a debated topic.

<sup>43</sup> This mention of the 2½ tribes is a ‘striking link’ both with Joshua and 1 Chr 5 (Auld, private communication). Some commentators point out the historical unreliability of the statement in 10:33 and argue, based on the fact that Israel did not even have control of the territory at the time, that the verse is a late addition either in part or in whole. Wiseman, *Kings*, 229 comments: ‘We know too little of the history of Moab to question the reliability of these statements, and Moab itself could have been weak at this time.’ Some commentators mention the earlier parallels. We are arguing that it is part of a larger rhetorical strategy that emphasises a ‘reversal of history’: what YHWH first gives to Israel, he first takes away. See Burney, *Notes*, 307; Montgomery and Gehman, *Kings*, 412-13; Gray, *Kings*, 563-64; Jones, *Kings*, 2:474; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 131; Provan, *Kings*, 217; P. House, *Kings*, 295-96.

construction of high places for Chemosh the god of the Moabites (1 Kgs 11.7, 33), we have not heard from Moab as a sustained presence since David's subjugation of them in 2 Sam 8.2. It is not coincidental that on one side of the Elisha narratives the reader meets the rebellion of Moab against Jehoram of Israel, while on the far side of the Elisha narratives the reader meets with the rebellion of Edom against Jehoram of Judah (2 Kgs 8.20-22). The dread first gripping Moab and Edom in Exodus 15:15 (*cf.* Josh 5.1) has evaporated as Israel's primordial enemies return to the narrative.<sup>44</sup>

The transitional figures of Joshua and Elisha thus fall either side of Solomon, for Joshua is set within wider Israel's movement away from bondage and toward kingship, while Elisha exhibits a movement away from kingship and towards bondage.<sup>45</sup> J. G. McConville, supported by the works of M. A. O'Brien<sup>46</sup> and C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger,<sup>47</sup> argues against a view which sees Joshua as an ideal royal figure and opts instead for an idea of 'trajectory' in Israel's transition to kingship.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, K. L. Younger's comparison of the conquest accounts in Joshua 9-12 with other ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts is, in effect, a comparison of the activities of Joshua with the activities of royal figures whether Hittite, Assyrian,

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<sup>44</sup> This is supported by the similar view of T. R. Hobbs, '2 Kings 1 and 2,' 334. Hobbs also recognises a connection between the illness of the kings, the return of 'rebels' and the loss of land.

<sup>45</sup> G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 116-23. Gerbrandt writes: 'The above is sufficient to show that in the Deuteronomistic History Joshua is seen as a royal figure, as a forerunner to the kings and not as one of the charismatic judges' (p. 199). Elsewhere he concludes that 'Joshua foreshadows the rise of kingship' (p. 190). The concept of Joshua as an ideal saviour is argued for by M. A. Beek, 'Joshua the Savior' in M. Kessler (trans., ed.), *Voices from Amsterdam: A Modern Tradition of Reading Biblical Narrative*, SBLSS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 145-53. This appeared earlier as 'Josua und Retterideal' in Hans Goedicke (ed.), *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 35-42.

<sup>46</sup> M. A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Reassessed*, OBO 92 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, *Josua und Salomo: Eine Studie zu Autorität und Legitimität des Nachfolgers im Alten Testament*, VTSup 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See also id., 'Joschua und Elischä Ideal-Typen von Führerschaft in Israel,' in M. Augustin and K.-D. Schunk (eds.), *Wünschet, Jerusalem Frieden': Collected Communications to the XIIth Congress of the IOSOT, Jerusalem, 1986* (Frankfurt/Bern/New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 273-80. Here Schäfer-Lichtenberger argues that the figures of Joshua, Solomon and Elisha merge the gifts of charisma and institutional authority (p. 279).

<sup>48</sup> J. G. McConville, 'King and Messiah in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History,' in J. Day (ed.), *King and Messiah*, 271-94 (287, 294).



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absence calls these aspects into question.’<sup>53</sup> Anonymity (and confused identities) in our stories would appear to have just such a destabilising effect on the narrative as evidenced by the disruption of the regnal chronology and the confusion of royal names. At a point of textual and chronological confusion we have Jehoram of Israel and Jehoram of Judah followed immediately by Elisha’s succession (2 Kgs 1.17-18).<sup>54</sup> Reinhartz, surprisingly, does not treat the anonymity of the king of Israel from 2 Kgs 3.7-8.15 in any detail. She recognises the anonymity of the king but claims that ‘the context identifies him as the King Joram (also known as Jehoram) of Israel (2 Kgs 3:1; 8:16).’<sup>55</sup> Thus the question of the function of anonymity in this swath of text remains an open question even in a book on anonymity.

By contrast, as we have noted, the named prophet is involved in king-like tasks. For example, upon learning of the intruding prophet, the king of Aram commands his servants to ‘Go and see’ (לְכוּ וּרְאוּ, 2 Kgs 6.13) where Elisha dwells. The same command is given by the king of Israel in 2 Kgs 7.14b. Elisha echoes this kingly command in word and deed calling upon the Arameans to ‘Come after me’ (לְכוּ אַחֲרַי, 2 Kgs 6.19a) and then praying that YHWH would enable them to see (וַיִּרְאוּ...וַיִּרְאוּ 2

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<sup>53</sup> A. Reinhartz, “Why Ask My Name?” *Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 188.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. LXX at 4 Reg 1.18a-d and MT at 2 Kgs 3.1. Bergen, ‘Alternative,’ 134 claims that ‘the disorder is significant to our understanding of the relationships of power in the text.’ The destabilising effect may be applied to chapters 4-8 only in so far as they have been placed within the chronological framework of Kings. To observe this from a different perspective see the textual citations for 2 Kings in J. Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOTSup 66 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 295. Note that the treatment necessarily moves from 2 Kgs 3.1 to 2 Kgs 8.7-15 with no mention of intervening verses: history ends in the early portion of chapter 3 and doesn’t begin again until Hazael’s appearance in chapter 8. Hughes concludes that the chronology of Kings is ‘historically inaccurate, but it is not corrupt’ since writers were more interested in ‘chronological schematism than historical accuracy.’ Kings has been reshaped from an originally non-schematic chronology in order to emphasise the divine plan in history (pp. 264-65). Galil, *Chronology*, 6-7 has vigorously challenged this thesis although Hughes’ work has been well received [see reviews by W. H. Irwin, *CBQ* 54 (1992) 323-24; G. H. Jones, *JTS* 42 (1991) 155-57; J. Barton, *JJS* 41 (1990) 261-63; L. K. Handy, *CRBR* (1992) 97-99]. Shenkel has noted there is little chronological reference in chapters 4-8 and therefore no room for chronological conflict (*Chronology*, 92). For a discussion of the issues with respect to Jehoram’s reign see Shenkel, *Chronology*, 69-74; Galil, *Chronology*, 138-141. For our purposes we note that two Jehorams on the throne at the same time, one in Israel and one in Judah, remain a possibility according to Galil’s proposal (p. 147).

<sup>55</sup> Reinhartz, “Why Ask My Name?”, 110.

Kgs 6.20).<sup>56</sup> However, we must not pass by the phrase לְכוּ אַחֲרַי too quickly. Recall Sheriffs' observation that this 'walking metaphor' likely arose in the context of a political sphere 'where allegiance to a king meant "walking after him" in the sense of joining in the advance of his army.'<sup>57</sup>

Elsewhere in 2 Kgs 6, Elisha (v. 9) joins the king of Israel (v. 10) and the king of Aram (v. 13) as subjects of the verb שָׁלַח.<sup>58</sup> Elisha not only establishes himself as the leader of the Aramean army, he ultimately sets 'royal policy' in his determination of the treatment of the captives.<sup>59</sup> In Israel the king was not directly responsible for the protection of the nation. At points of military crisis the king was to trust YHWH for protection.<sup>60</sup> This, Elisha does with his call to 'fear not' and his dependence upon YHWH in 2 Kgs 6.16-18.

### The Re-Formation of Former Enemies in the Former Prophets

With respect to the *reversal of history* previously mentioned, it may be observed that in the Elisha narratives with its anonymous and weak king, we encounter a Judges-like world in which 'there is no king in Israel.' The centrally focused royal anonymity (2 Kgs 4-8.15) is surrounded by the blending of monarchical identities as well as the mingling of the northern and southern kingdoms by marriage and alliance (2 Kgs 1.17-18; 3; 8.16-29).<sup>61</sup> Similarly, YHWH is found only in the כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה of

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<sup>56</sup> LaBarbara, 'Man of War,' 643 points out the irony of this situation. Elisha, enabling the Arameans to 'go and see' actually helps them to fulfil their king's prior command (v. 13). This view is supported by the clauses that follow in each case (וְהִגִּיד בְּרוּךְ שְׁמִרְיֹן / וְהִגִּיד בְּרוּךְ). LaBarbara thus sees Elisha as the commander and personification of the heavenly force (p. 642) as well as the 'military leader' of the Arameans (p. 644).

<sup>57</sup> Sheriffs, *Friendship of the Lord*, 100-101. Sheriffs notes that the metaphor is found both in the Hebrew Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern documents. While the phrase הֵלֵךְ אַחֲרַי is used extensively in the Hebrew Bible, in 1 Kings it describes following after gods, either YHWH or others (1 Kgs 11.10; 14.8; 18.18, 21; 21.26) or following after prophets (1 Kgs 13:14; 1 Kgs 19.20, 21). In 2 Kings it is used of Elisha going after the Shunammite (4.30); the Arameans after Elisha (6.19), the scouting party after the Arameans (7.15), or Israel after worthless things and nations (17.15).

<sup>58</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Nelson, *Kings*, 187.

<sup>60</sup> Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, 190.

<sup>61</sup> We might add A. G. Auld's observation that 'the gradual spiral descent into chaos of judge after

Elisha's speech (2.21; 3.16,17; 4.43; 7.1). It is Elisha who fills the monarchic and divine space. The unnamed מושיע of 2 Kgs 13.4-5 resonates with the framework (*Rahmenschema*) of Judges as the 'saviour' is resurrected.<sup>62</sup> Lasine has likewise noted the return to the chaos of Judges in the cannibalism of 2 Kgs 6.28.<sup>63</sup>

Times of chaos are the soil in which narratives of identity are produced.<sup>64</sup> If tumultuous eras encourage the development of identity in an attempt to bring order to chaos what should we make of narratives depicting times of peace among the royal families of Israel and Judah which employ anonymity with respect to the king of Israel?<sup>65</sup> If narratives which create identity impose order on existing chaos do narratives that employ anonymity impose chaos on existing order? Do they somehow comment implicitly on the chaos underlying the tranquil narrative surface?<sup>66</sup>

The exodus-conquest traditions assume a rather clear 'us vs. them' stance toward external enemies. It is in narratives of identity, such as those in the Book of Joshua, where such distinctions are made.<sup>67</sup> However the Elisha narratives, ostensibly influenced by the exodus-conquest traditions, assume 'an ambivalent posture' concerning the destruction of the enemy.<sup>68</sup> Hence an interesting pattern develops:

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judge prefigures Israel in Kings with royal house fruitlessly succeeding royal house.' A. G. Auld, 'The Deuteronomists Between History and Theology,' in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds.), *IOSOT Congress Volume, Oslo 1998*, VTSup 80 (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2000), 360.

<sup>62</sup> So Würthwein, *Könige*, 2:361. See also Gray, *Kings*, 595; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 167; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 143. For the placement of 13.4-21 within the Elisha traditions see W. Thiel, 'Jahwe und Prophet in der Elisa-Tradition,' in J. Hausmann and H.-J. Zobel (eds.), *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie: Festschrift für Horst Dietrich Preuß zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), 93-103 (93).

<sup>63</sup> Lasine, 'Jehoram,' 39.

<sup>64</sup> Linville, *Israel*, 74-111, especially 80-82, 86; Rowlett, *Rhetoric*, 11: 'Times of turmoil tend to foster narratives of identity – that is explanations of who they are, their origins and their perception of their destiny – during periods when chaos poses its most potent threat.'

<sup>65</sup> Bergen, 'Alternative,' 127 notes the 'relative theological peace' that follows Elijah's triumph over Ahab, Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal.

<sup>66</sup> Recall our previous discussion of שלום and Elisha as a prophet of restoration. The relationship between loss of identity and the return of enemies is noted by J. Treballe-Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill; Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 277.

<sup>67</sup> Rowlett, *Rhetoric*, 12. Younger, *Conquest*, 233. According to Younger, this is one of the ideological similarities manifest in Hebrew, Assyrian, and Egyptian texts.

<sup>68</sup> Moore, *God Saves*, 140.

narratives of identity encourage order with clearly distinguished boundaries of ‘us vs. them’; narratives of anonymity foster chaos with the blurring of lines between insiders and outsiders. For example, Naaman the outsider receives Elisha’s blessing, and Gehazi the insider gains Naaman’s leprosy.<sup>69</sup> However, narrative identity and anonymity is a manifold and intricate subject and therefore not easily tamed by a simple category like ‘chaos-producing.’<sup>70</sup>

We previously discussed the return of Moab and Edom as the foreshadowing of the exile. This re-formation of enemies in the Elisha narratives is mirrored in the Former Prophets with the return of ‘plunderers’ (שָׁדִיִּים) and ‘raiders’ (גִּדְוָדִים). Both are non-existent during the reign of Solomon and both have an interesting pattern of occurrences. For example, the שָׁדִיִּים are found at Judg 2.14, 16; 1 Sam 14.48 (Saul defeats); 23.1 (David defeats); and 2 Kgs 17.20.<sup>71</sup> They return to the narrative in this latter verse as YHWH’s judgment against Israel. However, sandwiched between the notice of YHWH’s exceeding anger against Israel (2 Kgs 17.18) and the return of the plunderers in 17.19 is the reminder that Judah was acting like Israel.<sup>72</sup> This repeats a theme previously highlighted in the Elisha stories with respect to the royal houses.

Likewise the גִּדְוָדִים / גִּדְוָדִים are found in the Former Prophets at 1 Sam 30.8, 15, 23; [2 Sam 3.22; 4.2; 22.30 // Ps 18.30]; 1 Kgs 11.24; 2 Kgs 5.2; 6.23; 13.21; 24.2 (4x). Note again the pattern of these appearances. They are initially an external enemy of David which arises in 1 Sam 30 only to disappear from the narrative stage.<sup>73</sup> They return only at the end of Solomon’s reign as judgment for his idolatry (1 Kgs 11.24).

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<sup>69</sup> See C.-J. Axskjöld, *Aram as the Enemy Friend: the Ideological Role of Aram in the Composition of Genesis – 2 Kings*, ConBOT 45 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1998). He argues that the Arameans are the instruments of YHWH and, in close collaboration with Elisha, bring judgment upon Israel and its kings (p.145). It would be interesting to consider other places in the Hebrew Bible where such reversals takes place.

<sup>70</sup> See Reinhartz, “*Why Ask My Name?*”, 188-89 for the effects of anonymity.

<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere as a substantive in Isa 17.14; Jer 50.11. Note that they are not found within 1/2 Chronicles.

<sup>72</sup> Linville, *Israel*, 202-12.

<sup>73</sup> The bracketed passages refer to places where either the גִּדְוָדִים / גִּדְוָדִים are not external enemies (2 Sam 3.22; 4.2) or used as metonymy (2 Sam 22.30).

They are found again in the Elisha narratives (2 Kgs 5.2; 6.23; 13.21), and finally in the onslaught (grand finale?) of the theologically charged 2 Kgs 24.2 where the construct (גִּדְרֵי) is used four times. Here YHWH sends bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites against Judah.<sup>74</sup> It is Elisha, rather than a king (and rather like a king) who, in the middle of the narrative space of 1 and 2 Kings, puts these ‘raiding bands’ to flight – healing Naaman, their commander (cf. 2 Kgs 5.1-2) and capturing and feeding them (2 Kgs 6.8-23). Even in his death Elisha is able to counter the effects of Moabite raiders (13.21).<sup>75</sup>

The above discussion may provide exegetical dividends in the strange juxtaposition of 6.23 and 6.24. After the release of the Aramean army (at Elisha’s command, v. 23), the text claims that the raiding parties ceased their activity in the land of Israel. This is followed immediately by the contradictory gathering of Ben-Hadad’s entire force against Samaria. This is often viewed as an editorial seam and so it may be.<sup>76</sup> However, the narrative pattern is not without precedent. Following the first (1 Kgs 19.21, cf. 20.1) and the last (2 Kgs 6.23, cf. v. 24) stories in which Elisha is directly involved in the feeding of people, we read that Ben-Hadad gathered his entire army in order to besiege Samaria. The partially-realised rest from war afforded the land in Joshua’s time (Josh 11.23; 14.15; 21.43-45) and consolidated during Solomon’s reign (1 Kgs 4.20, 5.4-5; ET 4.24-25) is, as in the time of the Judges, a short-lived reality for Samaria. In Samaria there is to be no rest from war.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> In 1/2Chr they are found at 1 Chr 7.4; 12.19, 22; 2 Chr 22.1; 25.9, 10, 13; 26.11. The only occurrence in the Pentateuch is at Gen 49.19 of Gad.

<sup>75</sup> At least one ancient interpreted the story in this manner. Josephus turns the Moabite raiders into ‘robbers’ (λῆστές) who have actually murdered the man being thrown into Elisha’s grave. He uses the word λῆστές regularly to refer to those revolutionaries who fought against the Romans at Masada. Thus in rendering the biblical story for his audience, Josephus portrays Elisha as ‘countering’ the activities of these ‘brigands.’ See L. H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus’ Rewritten Bible*, JSJSup 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 334-351 (347).

<sup>76</sup> Jones, *Kings*, 2:431; Auld, *Kings*, 174; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 78; Wiseman, *Kings*, 210. However note Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 74-5.

<sup>77</sup> Compare the opposing statements in Joshua portraying the ‘conquest’ as ongoing (13.1b-2a; 15.63; 16.10; 17.12). The writer of Kings also reminds the reader in 1 Kgs 9.21 of the people groups still left in the land.

Even within the confines of Kings we observe this ‘reversal of history’ as well as a comparison with Solomon. By moving forward through the narrative we move backwards via repeated and transformed events. On the one hand, it is Solomon’s idolatry that brings about a divided kingdom and eventually exile for *Israel*. The judgment meted out for this monarchic idolatry (1 Kgs 11.31-33) – the raising up of ‘raiders’ and the removal of the ten tribes – is connected to the rebellion of Jeroboam, which itself leads to the establishment of *בית במות* (1 Kgs 12.31).<sup>78</sup> The association of Solomon’s sin and the consequent exile is made subtly in 2 Kgs 17.20-23: Israel had been torn away from David.<sup>79</sup> Jeroboam was made king of Israel. Israel was led into sin. YHWH removed them from his sight. The initial telling of these events in 1 Kgs 11-12 is followed by the appearance of the cryptic man of God from Judah (1 Kgs 13).

On the other hand the pattern is loosely transformed in the Elisha narratives; the earlier disunity between Israel and Judah is replaced by a collapsed identity such that the kingdoms are, at the level of narrative portrayal, indistinguishable from one another. Equivalence of this nature, along with Solomon’s culpability even in the fall of the northern kingdom, counters Bergen’s view that the DtrH wishes to judge Israel more harshly than Judah.<sup>80</sup> The peace of Solomon’s reign is followed by kingdom division and the appearance of the man of God from Judah while kingdom reunion, in the form of a tentative and – from the standpoint of the narrator – inappropriate peace between Israel and Judah, leads to the appearance of the man of God from Israel, namely Elisha. In each case civil war follows the death of the man of God (cf.

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<sup>78</sup> D. V. Edelman, ‘Solomon’s Adversaries Hadad, Rezon and Jeroboam: A Trio of “Bad Guy” Characters. Illustrating the Theology of Immediate Retribution’ in S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy (eds.), *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, JSOTSup 190 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 166-91.

<sup>79</sup> There is debate about the subject of קרע in 2 Kgs 17.21. M. Brettler, ‘Ideology, History, and Theology in 2 Kings XVII 7-23,’ *VT* 39 (1989) 268-82 argues that the subject is Israel rather than YHWH. For a discussion of the interpretative difficulties associated with this verse see Linville, *Israel*, 210-12.

<sup>80</sup> So Bergen, ‘Alternative,’ 136.

1 Kgs 12.21-24 // 14.30; 2 Kgs 14.11-14). Within each tradition there is an interest in the burial place of the man of God (1 Kgs 13.31; 2 Kgs 13.20-21).

Elisha is an enigmatic prophet placed in enigmatic stories. The function of the prophet within the stories and the message of the stories within the larger book of Kings have been called into question from a number of perspectives. We have attempted to put Elisha in his place, arguing that in 2 Kings 2-8 he is portrayed in a manner both royal and divine, performing deeds typical of the king and YHWH. He does this by providing food, healing, restoration, protection, and security. As the final northern prophet he holds out the promise of YHWH's presence in a series of stories in which YHWH does not speak directly. The answer to the question raised in 2 Kings 2.14, 'Where is YHWH God of Elijah?', is answered finally in 2 Kings 8.1-6: the great deeds of Elisha are the great deeds of YHWH. These actions take place against the backdrop of confused royal identities, the co-mingling of the northern and southern kingdoms, and the anonymity of the weak king of Israel. The present study adopts and supports the proposal of T. Collins that a 'royal metaphor' which once united king and people has given way to a 'prophetic metaphor' now uniting prophet and people. In Elisha the metaphor is mixed. This multifaceted prophetic portrayal, when viewed as a narrative 'collage', lends literary coherence to a set of narratives often viewed as disparate based on their diversity of form and content.

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