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TITLE: The Figure of Elijah the Prophet
in I. II Kings

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07-3114

The Figure of Elijah the Prophet in I and II Kings

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York**

**February 1st, 2007
Advisor: Dr. S. David Sperling**

Thesis Summary:

The contribution of this thesis is that it presents a clear and concise summary of the character known as the prophet Elijah in I and II Kings. The thesis adds to the current scholarship by attempting to capture the complexity of the character himself within the context of the narratives. Much of the current scholarship on Elijah is done from a source-critical approach; however this current study takes a holistic approach. As a result of reading the narrative as a single unit, I was able to focus more on the themes and motifs that occur in the narrative in relationship to Elijah.

The goal of the thesis was to analyze the Elijah narratives that appear in I and II kings as a single complete unit that appear in the larger context of Kings. The hope was that through reading the text as whole the study would be able to concentrate more on the complexities of the character himself, the themes and motifs that occur in the narratives as well as the role that Elijah plays in the larger Deuteronomistic context. The Thesis is divided into four chapters; the introduction, an overview of I and II kings (themes and the current scholarship), and overview of the Elijah narratives, and the themes and motifs. In the process of writing the thesis I used a variety of resources; ranging from classical rabbinic literature, medieval commentaries, modern scholarly commentaries, and academic articles.

Chapter I Introduction

Elijah in the Hebrew Bible

Elijah; man of God, miracle worker, kingmaker, mediator of YHWH's word, zealot for YHWH, warrior, mysterious loner, scribe¹, and harbinger of the awesome and terrible day of YHWH², these are but a few of the ways in which the Hebrew Bible portrays the prophet Elijah. The character known as Elijah appears in three different places in the Hebrew Bible; I and II Kings, at the end of the book of Malachi and in II Chronicles.

We are first introduced to "Elijah the *Tishbite*, an inhabitant of Gilead" rather abruptly and suddenly in the opening verses of I Kings 17. He emerges on the scene mysteriously and in just a few short chapters mysteriously disappears, but only after he confronts the king, revives the dead, challenges the prophets of Baal, encounters YHWH on a mountain, orders the killing of foreign prophets, runs away in fear and anoints his successor. Most of what we know about Elijah's life and ministry comes from the narratives of I Kings 17-19, 21 and II Kings 1-2. In the Kings narratives the "major unifying theme"³ is the prophet's opposition to Baal worship and his struggle with the Omride dynasty in the form of King Ahab and his foreign wife Jezebel. Elijah is depicted as the "hero of *Yahwism*, the prophet who speaks the word of the true God, the new Moses, who withstands royal

¹ II Chronicles 21:12 "A letter from Elijah the prophet came to him which reads..." The verse does not specifically call Elijah a scribe but this is the only reference to a written prophecy penned by the prophet in the form of a letter. This Chronicles passage is unique, inasmuch as all of his other prophecies, which appear in the book of Kings, are delivered orally to the king.

² Mal 3:23

³ Walsh, Jerome, "Elijah." *ABD* II:430.

oppression and preserves the faith".⁴ He is "a prophet of YHWH with grand originality all afire with zeal for his God and conscious of the divine power which works within him"⁵

The narratives of I and II Kings present us with a detailed and complex picture of Elijah. At times he seems to be a figure "devoured by egotism and preoccupied by his image as a prophet of YHWH"⁶, confident in his relationship with YHWH and the power of his words. At other times he seems to lose his own will to live or running away in fear of death. To be sure, the narratives give us a great bit of detail about the prophet's actions and deeds during his active ministry but there is little information about the prophet prior to his bursting on to the scene in I Kings 17:1. While the Elijah narratives end with his miraculous ascension to heaven in a fiery chariot in II Kings 2, his name reappears in the Elisha narratives that follow. In II Kings 3 Elijah is mentioned in connection with Elisha, and in II Kings 9:36 and 10:10, 17, the unrealized prophecies from his narratives are reported to have been fulfilled.

His mysterious appearance, the scant biographical information, his seeming ability to appear and disappear in a moment's notice, his association with countless miracles and the spectacle of his ascension to heaven, are what make Elijah stand out from most other prophets who appear in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps it is his very nature which leads to his inclusion in the final chapters and verses of the Book of Malachi. Malachi 3:23 reads:

"I will send the prophet Elijah⁷ to you before the great and terrible day of YHWH".

הִנֵּה אֲנִי שֶׁלֵּחַ לָכֶם אֶת אֵלֶיָּה הַנָּבִיא לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא

⁴ Walsh, Jerome, "Elijah." II:464.

⁵ Leah Bronner. *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*. (Pretoria Oriental Series 6. Leiden: Brill, 1968), ix.

⁶ John W Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 80 (1998): 48.

⁷ Elijah' name appears in the text in a long form and short form – "eliya" and "elijahu", here in Mal it appears in the short form.

Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible does it state or imply that someone from the past will return and “play a decisive role in Israel’s future as well.” Even though most scholars acknowledge that the last few verses of Malachi, in which Elijah appears, are an editorial addition,⁸ its importance cannot be overstated. Not only is the mention of Elijah’s impending return significant for our current study, it also plays an immeasurable role in how post-biblical sources from the New Testament to rabbinic literature portray the prophet.⁹ Yet as Brenda J. Shaver explains, it is “no simple task” to explain exactly what kind of figure Elijah represents in Malachi, because the verse is “intimately” linked to Mal 3:1 which refers “a messenger” who will prepare the way of YHWH.¹⁰

Elijah also appears briefly in II Chronicles 21:12:

“A letter of from Elijah the prophet came to him, which read...”

וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו מִכְתָּב מֵאֵלֵיהֶוָה הַנָּבִיא לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי דָוִיד אַבְיָת תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכֵי
יְהוֹשָׁפָט אַבְיָת וּבְדַרְכֵי אֲסָא מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה

The letter is written by Elijah and sent to King Jehoram of Judah, rebuking him for leading the people astray as had Ahab. Elijah put his prophecy and rebuke in writing for the first time. This letter and prophecy are not mentioned anywhere in I and II Kings, and it is the only time that we are of any contact between Elijah and Jehoram. The similarities to his rebuke against the house of Ahab are striking. However, unlike Ahab, the king is not moved to repentance by the prophecy.

As this opening chapter will show, Elijah himself as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible is a diverse, intriguing and mysterious character. While most of what we know about his life

⁸ Hill, Andrew. *Malachi*, (Anchor Bible 25D. Garden City: Doubleday, 1998); 45.

⁹ This study will only deal with the Hebrew Bible and not the New Testament. Both Brenda Shaver and David George Clark in their Ph.D. thesis's deal more broadly with the prophet Elijah covering a longer period of time from the Hebrew Bible through the New Testament.

¹⁰ Brenda J Shaver. “The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period: The Growth of A Tradition.” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago Divinity School, 2001.), 71.

and activities as prophet comes from the Kings narratives, his brief mention in the book of Malachi plays no small role in the post-biblical portrayals of the prophet.

What do we know about Elijah from the Hebrew Bible?

Most of what we know about Elijah comes directly from the narratives in I and II Kings. Elijah's ministry takes place, according to Kings, during the reign of Ahab king of Judah, of the *Omride* dynasty, and his Phoenician wife Jezebel. This historical context becomes the centerpiece to Elijah's mission of "jealous resistance to the menace of paganism in Israel,"¹¹ which is personified in the foreign queen Jezebel. In II Kings we learn that he "dies" before the reign of Jehoram son of Ahab, during the reign of Jehosaphat of Israel. During his ministry we find the prophet wondering from East of the Jordan to places in the Northern Kingdom of Judah, to the wilderness outside of both kingdoms. The only time however, that he has any contact with the Kingdom of Judah in the south is in II Chronicles when he writes his letter of rebuke and doom to King Jehoram of Judah. His relationship with the established thrones was one of confrontation and rebuke. His entire prophetic life is spent in tension with the Omride dynasty under Ahab and his son Ahaziah. He is ultimately responsible for overthrowing of the Omride dynasty. This is accomplished by his successor Elisha who anoints the new king Jehu.

Elijah then is neither a "prophet of the cult" nor is he connected with a specific sanctuary. (In fact when he rebuilds the altar at Mt. Carmel in I King 18, it is consumed completely along with the sacrifice, leaving nothing behind.) Elijah is not "subject to the royal court" and he "doesn't have a constant home where people can seek him out". Elijah is not associated with one specific place where he can receive YHWH's word, mediate

¹¹Clark, David George, "Elijah as eschatological high priest: an examination of the Elijah tradition in Mal. 3:23-24 [English: Mal. 4:5-6]." (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1975.), 2.

YHWH's word, or perform miracles. Rather he wanders from place to place appearing suddenly when YHWH commands him.¹²

In light of his freedom from royal allegiance and parochial affiliation (and perhaps through his mystical powers of appearing and disappearing) the path of Elijah, unlike other prophets, is literally all over the map. He is born we assume in a place called *Tishbi* or *Toshav*, whose exact location remains a mystery. (See discussion below). However, at the time of our first encounter with the prophet in I Kings 17:1 the narrator tells us that he was or is a resident alien in the region of Gilead, east of the Jordan River. Whether or not he lived in Gilead for an extended period of time or even called that area his home is unclear from the text, but the narrator felt it important enough a detail to include it in Elijah's introduction. Immediately after his introduction to the reader, Elijah speaks directly to Ahab and although we are not given the location of the encounter, it is quite possible that Elijah spoke to the king in his capital of Samaria. Immediately following his pronouncement of a curse Elijah is commanded by YHWH to flee and hide in "the *wadi Cherith*",¹³ which is east of the Jordan.¹⁴ Elijah, having traveled west over the Jordan to confront the king, returns "home", east of the Jordan to more familiar territory. From here he is once again commanded by YHWH to travel a great distance, this time to the north-west to "Zarephet of Sidon",¹⁵ which is located north of the Israelite kingdom, in modern day Lebanon. This is

¹²Aharon Weiner, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism: A Depth-Psychological Study*. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 6.

¹³I Kings 17:2

¹⁴The wadi Cherith is yet to be located and identified. According to Cogan "*al pene*" can also mean overlooking in the vicinity of" rather than "east", which has lead some to look for the wadi west of the Jordan as apposed to east of the Jordan. There are some who even suggest that "Charith" is not a proper name but rather an adjective meaning "cut off" from water and that Elijah was being told to hide in the "craggs" of the Wadi. Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings*. (AB 10; Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 426.

¹⁵I Kings 17:9

the first geographical location associated with Elijah that we are able to physically identify today, and for which there are external biblical references.¹⁶

After spending time in the north, Elijah is once again summoned to appear before Ahab, again presumably in the capital of Samaria. While he is making the trek south towards the capital, he encounters in an undisclosed location Obadiah, messenger of the King and protector of the prophets of YHWH. Eventually Ahab comes to meet Elijah¹⁷, again in an unknown location, presumably some place between Sidon and Samaria. After his encounter with the king, we are again brought to a familiar and identifiable place, Mount Carmel, situated in within the northern kingdom and located in modern day Haifa, Israel.¹⁸ From Carmel Elijah runs in front of Ahab¹⁹ all the way to Jezreel, also located in the northern kingdom.²⁰ With the close of I Kings 18 and the beginning of 19 we see Elijah fleeing once more, but this time towards the south into the kingdom of Judah, and the city of Beer-Sheba.²¹ This is the first time the prophet crosses the border into the southern kingdom of Judah. From Beer-Sheba he travels a day's journey into the wilderness and eventually wanders for forty day and night until he arrives at the Mountain of God, Horeb. While we can not be certain about Horeb's location, it is clear that it is neither in the Northern kingdom, nor within the borders of the Judah. From Horeb, Elijah is commanded to travel again (north) east of the Jordan to the wilderness of Damascus.²² However, we are not informed of his route (described as the path upon which he came), adding even more ambiguity about the exact location of the Mountain of YHWH, Horeb.

¹⁶ The city is mentioned together with Sidon in a 13th century Egyptian text and was among the cities captured by Senacherib in 701. Cogan, *I Kings*, 10: 427.

¹⁷ I Kings 17:17

¹⁸ For discussion on Mount Carmel see Cogan, *I Kings*, 10: 438-439 note on verse 19.

¹⁹ I Kings 18:46

²⁰ Jezreel is the site of the Naboth affair of chapter 21 as well.

²¹ I Kings 19: 3

²² I Kings 19:155

Once again commanded by YHWH to confront the king, Elijah returns to Jezreel, and finds himself within the borders of the Northern kingdom. After Ahab's death Elijah's whereabouts are not referred to in the text; at least not until he is commanded by YHWH to confront the new king's prophets on their way to Ekron from Samaria. He meets them on their way to Ekron, which is southwest of Samaria in the area under Philistine control.²³ During his battle with the new king and his officers, Elijah perches himself on an anonymous hilltop in an unmentioned place. This anonymous place where Elijah is able to summon the fire of YHWH to kill the king's officers' underscores the fact that Elijah is not tied to a certain locale (and neither is YHWH for that matter).

In his final moments on earth we read that Elijah sets out from Gilgal which is located just near the town of Jericho. From Gilgal he travels to Beth-El, from Beth-El he goes on to Jericho and from Jericho he makes his way to the Jordan River. Thereupon the prophet ends his earthly journey and ascends to the heaven in a chariot of fire.²⁴ It must also be noted that the passage in II Chronicles, which speaks of Elijah writing a letter to the King of Israel, does not mention from where he was writing.

Elijah's active ministry cannot and should not be associated with one particular town, city or province. His ability to move from place to place, appear, disappear, reappear and travel great distances, is well attested to in the narratives. In I Kings 18:12, on his way to confront Ahab, Elijah encounter Obadiah who says to the prophet: "When I leave you the spirit of YHWH will carry you somewhere I do not know". Clearly, in his response to Elijah Obadiah is worried that the prophet will be miraculously carried off by YHWH to an undisclosed location, leaving him alone to confront Ahab. I Kings 18:46 also portrays the

²³ II Kings 1:2

²⁴ II Kings 2:1-12

prophet's miraculous ability to travel a great distance. This time "the hand of YHWH came upon Elijah" and he ran all the way to Jezreel. The numerous examples of his miraculous traveling capabilities are just one of the many features of Elijah the prophet that set him apart.

Elijah is portrayed as having other miraculous powers. In I Kings 17 he is reported to have resurrected a widow's son through prayer and physical contact. At Mount Carmel and in his encounter with the king's captains in II Kings 1 he is able to call upon and produce "the fire of YHWH"; first to consume his sacrifice and then to consume the king's captains. The narratives also relate Elijah's ability to split the Jordan by striking it with his mantle, which is passed down to his successor Elisha. Elijah is also the beneficiary of miracles. Hiding in the wadi during the drought, he is fed by ravens, and again is miraculously fed when he flees for his life from Jezebel.

Brenda J. Shaver puts it succinctly when she writes:

What serves to set Elijah apart from all other prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures (except for his successor Elisha) is his performance of or association with countless miracles – everything from raising the dead to life and multiplying food from heaven, parting the waters of the Jordan, and escaping death through heavenly ascension.²⁵

Perhaps the most mysterious part about Elijah is his biography. The only biographical information we have is "Elijah the *Tishbite* an inhabitant (?) of Gilead אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּישְׁבִּי מִגִּלְעָד in I Kings 17:1. This terse and ambiguous verse is in striking contrast to

²⁵ Shaver, "The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period: The Growth of a Tradition." 10.

the “wealth of detail” with which we have²⁶ of other prophets in the Hebrew Bible. What further shrouds Elijah’s origin in mystery are the words “Tishbite [תִּשְׁבִּי]” and “mtoshve” [מְתוֹשֵׁב]. Tishbite, is in the gentile²⁷ and describes where Elijah is from. However, the name or town known as Tishbi appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.²⁸ However, the real challenge lies in how to translate and understand the word “mittoshave [מְתוֹשֵׁב]”. It is usually translated as “one of the residents.” But as Cogan points out in his notes, *tshb*, can refer to “foreigners who sojourn in the land of Israel”.²⁹ Therefore, while the verse may suggest that Elijah lived in the Gilead, which is on the eastern side of the Jordan, his birthplace was elsewhere, namely the unknown place called Tishbi. *Radak* in his commentary on the verse also states that “from the city that is *Toshav*, which was his origin, and later he resided in Gilead”.³⁰

From the very beginning then, the origins of our prophet, which at first glance seem clear, are in actuality, unknown. Our mysterious prophet bursts forth on the scene hailing from a previously unknown town and region.³¹ What we have then from the very beginning is a character whose familial background is as mysterious as his ability to appear and disappear.

²⁶ Brenner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*, 18.

²⁷ Cogan, *I Kings*, 425.

²⁸ Brenner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*, 19. – There is a *Tishbi* of Naphtali mention in Tobith 1:2 which some scholars have connected with the *Tishbi* of Elijah. See Also Jerome T. Walsh *I Kings*. (*Beit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996.), 225-226. Walsh raises the question as to whether *Tishbi* could possibly be a “societal category, a clan or social class”. See also Brenner *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*, 19-12, with regards to Nelson Glueck’s assertion that the text should be amended to read more properly “Elijah, the *Jabeshite*, from *Jabesh-Gilead*”.

²⁹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 425.

³⁰ *Miqraot Gedolot Haketer* I and II Kings, 199.

³¹ The unknown origin and place of “*Tishbi*” or “*Toshav*” led the rabbis to ask the question: “From which tribe is Elijah from?” Some argued that he was from the tribe of Benjamin, while other argued that he was from the tribe of Gad. At a point in the argument Elijah himself appears and claims that he is from the tribe of Rachel. – *Genesis Rabbah* 71:12 and *Elijah Rabbah* 18.

Indeed, we are not even certain from our initial encounter as to whether he is truly a man of God. Unlike other prophets he is *not* introduced to the reader as prophet, but is merely called "Elijah." In his first encounter with the King, he proclaims the curse of the drought, saying "that there will be no rain or dew except by my word." In light of the "bold claim the prophets makes in the verse, the narrator's silence about his religious authority is striking".³² It is only in verse 2 after having passed along the curse, that we read that the "word of YHWH came to him." In fact Elijah is only referred to as "prophet" three times in the Hebrew Bible; I Kings 18:36 (the only time in the Kings narrative), in Mal 3:23 and II Chronicles 21:12. While we do come to understand Elijah as prophet, seer, and mediator of YHWH's word, in contrast to other prophets in the Hebrew Bible this is not clear from the outset.³³

One can not even be sure as to the proper spelling of his name. He is called both Eliyahu [אֱלִיָּהוּ] and Elijah [אֱלִיָּה], both of which are translated as Elijah. The most frequent spelling or usage is *Eliyahu* appearing most often in the narratives of I Kings. Whereas in II Kings, Malachi and II Chronicles the prophet is referred mostly to as "*eliya*". Whether Elijah or Eliyahu, his name means "YHWH is my God"³⁴. There are some scholars who claim that this may not have been his birth name and that he is called "*Eliyahu*" or "*Elijah*" because of zeal for YHWH and the worship of one God. Elijah could very well be his "religious alias"³⁵ and that his very name "proclaims the mission of the prophet".³⁶

The Hebrew Bible refers to Elijah in other ways well, depending upon who is speaking, what the actions of Elijah are and the context of the narrative. First, in some places

³² Walsh, *I Kings*, 226.

³³ Josephus and LXX refer to Elijah as prophet in verse 1.

³⁴ Cogan, *I Kings*, 425 and Brenner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*. 21.

³⁵ Cogan, *I Kings*, 425

³⁶ Brenner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemic against Baal Worship*. 21.

he is called "Elijah the prophet"³⁷, yet most of the time he is simply referred to as "*Eliyahu*" or "*Elijah*", without the title "prophet". But most commonly he is called "Elijah the Tishbi. In the story of the widow and her son in I Kings 17:18 and 24 and II Kings 1 and in his confrontation with the captains of the king's army, he is referred to as a "man of YHWH". In the same episode with the captains he is referred to as "a hairy man...with a leather belt tied around his waist" and immediately following is identified as "Eliya the Tishbi (in contrast to *Eliyahu*). Obadiah, during his first encounter with Elijah in I Kings 18:7 calls him "my lord". (Interestingly in this very same encounter the prophet refers to himself as Elijah, and not prophet). Ahab, the king, calls him "*troubler of Israel* [הַמְּאַתָּה זֶה עֹבֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל] as well as "my enemy." Finally, Elijah himself says that he is "most zealous for YHWH [קָנָא קָנָאתִי לַיהוָה], a unique self-description. The only other place in which someone is described as being zealous for YHWH is in Numbers 25:11 when *Phineas* kills the Israelite man and the Midianite women.³⁸

Elijah is also "*deliverer of oracles*"³⁹ in that he takes the word of YHWH of what will happen in the future and delivers it to the appropriate party. On several occasions he confronts Ahab, his wife Jezebel and eventually their son Ahaziah, to announce their doom by YHWH. In this vein Elijah is also "*rebuker*". In this role he not only confronts the sinful king and queen; he also assembles the entire people at Mount Carmel to rebuke them for their faithlessness. "How long will you keep hopping between two boughs (opinions)?"⁴⁰ He shouts to the people, before he engages in the sacrificial battle with the prophets of Baal. He

³⁷ I Kings 18:22, 36 and II Chronicles he is "*Eliyahu the prophet*" and in the Malachi verse he is called "*Eliya the prophet*".

³⁸ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings," 40.

³⁹ Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period*, 10.

⁴⁰ חֲסִידֵי הָאֱלֹהִים refers to the boughs of a fruit tree and the clefts of a rock. "The image seems to suggest the hopping back and forth between branches." There are others who suggest that image is something different. "sit on the fence", or "between two opinions. Cogan, *I Kings*, 439.

is also "mediator", meaning "he acts as the intermediary in effecting actions...behaving as prophetic courier of the divine word."⁴¹ This of course is only possible because Elijah is capable of direct contact with YHWH, through dialogue as seen in I Kings 19, or through the reception of YHWH's word. Elijah may also be seen as a messenger from his portrayal in Malachi. While he doesn't appear until the end of chapter 3, many have linked his mention to the "the messenger" mentioned in 3:1.

Elijah, like other prophets, exercises authority over the kings through his relationship with YHWH. However, unlike most prophets he acts as a revolutionary.⁴² In I Kings 18:16 Elijah is commanded to anoint a new king, Jehu. The appointment, while it doesn't take place in his lifetime, represents the downfall of the Omride dynasty and the establishment of new one under the rule of the line of Jehu. He is not just a king-maker, but a dynasty-maker as well. Elijah is the "great individual"⁴³, he is not of the ecstatic prophets nor does he receive his visions through dreams. His status, personality, and life are what make him stand out among other prophets in the Hebrew Bible. While much can indeed be gleaned from the narratives about his life and actions, there is still a great deal that is unknown about the prophet himself.

Perhaps the greatest mystery surrounding the prophet is the description of his death. In a fantastic scene, we read that he is carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot with flaming horses. We are not even told that he died. In the final narrative scene of his ministry, we once again learn about the prophet's nature. The mystery of Elijah's birth and death and his

⁴¹Judith A. Todd., "The Pre-Deuteronomic Elijah Cycle." *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*. (ed by Robert B. Coote. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 12.

⁴² Ahijah of Shiloh in I Kings 9:21 and I King 14:1-18 can also be viewed as a revolutionary. He is the one who "tore away the kingdom from the house of David" and gave it to Jeroboam. And he is the one who causes the complete destruction of the house of Jeroboam as a result of his great sin. He too made and broke a dynasty,

⁴³ Weiner, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism: A Depth-Psychological*, 7.

miraculous ministry have led many to question the historicity of the narrative and the prophet himself. It would be helpful before proceeding to summarize briefly what the current scholarship has to say about the Elijah pericope, with regard to the nature of the narratives in I and II kings.

Scholarship on Elijah

Much of the biblical scholarship on Elijah has sought to address the fantastic nature of the Elijah narrative against its 9th century historical setting. Cogan in the Anchor Bible Commentary asks:

Were the individual tales brought together in an early oracle, or is their integration the result of collection into a literary unit prior to their insertion into the narrative of Kings? What was the role of the Dtr in shaping the tradition?

He continues:

The disparate nature of the episodes favors taking their present juxtaposition to be a literary compilation removed somewhat from an oral setting among the followers of the prophet.⁴⁴

Over a century ago Herman Gunkel classified the Elijah stories as "legend" and raised serious questions regarding their unity and historicity. Yet he never doubted the existence of a prophet in the 9th century BCE called Elijah, and he was only concerned with the stories' pre-literary stages.⁴⁵ Alexander Rofé in his book "The Prophetic Stories", concentrating in

⁴⁴Cogan, *I Kings*, 430.

⁴⁵Shaver, "The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period," 11-13.

more detail on the literary nature of the stories, claims that simple legends, which originated orally in the Northern kingdom among the prophets and his disciples associated with Elisha, over time developed into ethical legends. In these legends, the value of magic is downplayed and the power of YHWH is brought to the forefront. This is represented in the received Elijah narratives.⁴⁶ Yet, a third scholar, Martin Noth claims that the Elijah stories were originally separate stories woven together into a more or less unified source and that the Deuteronomistic editor added the stories to his overall narrative.⁴⁷

This discussion of the historicity of Elijah is important because he is not only described as prophet, but is also responsible for the toppling of a dynasty and the installation of a new royal line. It is generally held that the Elijah cycle is in fact, a composite of different motifs and themes that play up the miraculous powers of the prophet and the central role of YHWH as the one true God. The stories that now appear in I and II Kings developed over a long period of time and have gone through a long process of editing.

Therefore, what role if any can we say Elijah actually played in the downfall of the Omride dynasty. Many scholars believe that Elijah was connected to a "9th century prophetic revolution linked directly with the Jehu revolt."⁴⁸ Elijah or an Elijah-like character existed in some form or another during the reign of Ahab. This character most likely played a role in the revolt, and through a complex oral tradition became connected with certain miraculous and fantastic stories. These legends eventually made their way into the Kings narrative. Shaver claims that the narratives have been edited too many times and that historically they

⁴⁶Shaver, "The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period," 16-23.

⁴⁷Shaver, "The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period," 27-28. See also Susan Otto "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27.4 (2003): 488.

⁴⁸Marsh C. White *The Elijah Legends and the Jehu Coup*. (Brown Judaic Studies Number 311. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 3.

can no longer be understood apart from their 6th century context, when they were included in the narrative.⁴⁹ Therefore although the cycle may have originated in the 9th century at the time of Ahab, it was finally redacted centuries later. Marsha C. White argues something else altogether. Her claim is that Elijah is too much a composite of other biblical characters like Moses, Elisha, and Nathan. Therefore he must be an "invention" of the Jehu court and its scribes who needed to "legitimate the revolt". Elijah, she claims is largely a "derived figure".⁵⁰

The debate over the historicity and origin of Elijah continues in the current scholarship and literature. While the focus of the current analysis does not deal specifically with the above-mentioned issues and debates, it is nonetheless important to understand this context as we move into a deeper analysis of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible. We can conclude then that there is a complex history of orality and redaction behind the Elijah narratives and the figure Elijah himself. This tradition has developed over time and focuses on the prophet's relationship to YHWH and his role in the downfall of the Omride dynasty. Malachi and II Chronicles have not been subjected to such historical and critical analysis. This is due to fact that both books were written and redacted much later than I and II Kings. It seems clear (as we will discuss later on) that both sources rely on what is already known about Elijah from the King narratives.

This thesis will attempt to understand the Elijah pericope as a unified narrative. While I cannot ignore the composite nature of the legends, I have chosen to attempt to gain a better understanding of the prophet through reading the text it has been received. What are the overall themes and motifs that appear in the legends? What are the parallels that we can

⁴⁹Shaver, "The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period," 39.

⁵⁰White, *The Elijah Legends and the Jehu Coup*, 3-4.

draw from other biblical characters? Who are the people with whom Elijah interacts and what can those interactions tell us about the prophet? What is the overall picture of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible?

Chapter 2: I and II Kings

Background on I and II Kings⁵¹

As we have already noted the vast majority of the Elijah material in the Hebrew Bible appears in I and II Kings. Therefore, a brief overview of Kings, its over all themes, and scholarship are necessary to gain a better understanding of how Elijah is portrayed in the narratives.

Overview:

I Kings begins with an account of the final days of David's reign and the ascension to the throne of his son Solomon. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom is divided into two thrones; Israel in the North and Judah in the South. I and II Kings chronicles both kingdoms covering roughly a 400 year period, until the destruction of Judah in the south.⁵² The books follow a general chronological order, alternating between the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.⁵³ Yet, I and II Kings are not an "unbiased history". They are "historical commentaries" concerned with the failures and shortcomings of the throne via royal disloyalty to YHWH.⁵⁴ The entire "history" presented in Kings is retold in light of the "catastrophic" end of the Northern kingdom and the "impending doom" of Judah in the south.⁵⁵

The nameless person/narrator/redactor of Kings is known as the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr). His main concerns are: loyalty to YHWH, observing the teachings of Moses

⁵¹ The books of I and II Kings were originally one book but were divided into 2 distinct books by the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor. *II Kings*. (AB 11; Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 3.

⁵² John Gray. *I and II Kings*. (Old Testament Library. 2d ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 5.

⁵³ Cogan and Tadmor, *II King*, 3.

⁵⁴ Gray, *I and II Kings*, 5.

⁵⁵ Cogan and Tadmor, *II King*, 3.

and the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem.⁵⁶ These themes and I and II Kings are generally understood to be part of a larger corpus known as the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) which runs from the book of Deuteronomy through the end of II Kings.⁵⁷ As the Dtr retells his version of "history" each king is judged negatively or positively, based on his loyalty to YHWH and observance of the Mosaic laws⁵⁸. The kings are either praised as living up to the standards of Hezekiah and Josiah, who reformed the cultic practices and "closed down local shrines", ⁵⁹or they are as sinful as the most reviled Jeroboam "who sinned and caused Israel to sin" by setting up temples in Dan and Beth-El decentralizing the cultic worship of YHWH.

Furthermore, the Dtr chose to include the stories of certain prophets who bolster his polemic against non-yahwistic worship and decentralization of the cult. It is through these prophets that the word of YHWH is delivered and eventually fulfilled in history. This, as we will see, will be significant when we encounter Elijah during the reign of Ahab. It is Ahab that the Dtr describes as "not content to follow the sins of Jeroboam." (I Kings 16:30), setting up the Dtr's negative view of Ahab's actions with regard to his marriage of Jezebel and the worship of Baal. It is in the Elijah narratives and in Elijah's battles with the Omride dynasty that the Dtr's concerns and themes are emphasized. It is YHWH alone who is the true god, and it is through his prophet Elijah that his words and desires will be realized in history.

⁵⁶ Cogan, *I Kings*, 96.

⁵⁷ Steven W. Holloway, "The Books of I and II Kings," *ABD* IV:71.

⁵⁸ Classic Deuteronomistic theology is based on obedience to YHWH. If one obeys YHWH then one will receive blessing and if one disobeys YHWH then one will be cursed. YHWH is a god who acts in history in behalf of those who are faithful to him and to his laws. The kings of both Judah and Israel are therefore judged accordingly by the Dtr based on their obedience to YHWH within this context of blessing/curse. The Dtr understands the success and failures of the kings and the prosperity of the kingdom to be based upon the king and the people's loyalty to YHWH.

⁵⁹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 96.

Authorship and Scholarship:

I and II Kings are a "creative and unique literary composition whose very complexity continues to baffle those who would surgically isolate the original source"⁶⁰. This statement reflects the debate among scholars with regard to redaction, final compilation and actual authorship of the books. Over a century ago Julius Wellhausen argued that the writer of the DtrH culled pre-existing sources (some mentioned in Kings), and was inspired by the reform of Josiah around 621 BCE. The compiler was responsible for some of the extended narratives, creating a framework for the chronology of the kings in both kingdoms, and issuing a "verdict on the cultic purity". According to Wellhausen the original redaction took place no later than 600 BCE, shortly after the time of Josiah. He further argued for a later exilic-redaction, which led scholars to re-date the Judahite kings post Josiah (609 BCE – 586 BCE).⁶¹

Martin Noth, however, is the one who first posited the notion of the single DtrH starting from the book of Joshua and running through II Kings. Noth claimed that a single author in the 6th century BCE produced a "unified work" detailing Israel's decline as it neglected its one true god, YHWH. The Dtr wrote, according to Noth, from the viewpoint of the Deuteronomic Law.⁶² The Dtr for Noth used Kings to greatly "express the theological evaluation"⁶³ of history. The Dtr accomplishes this through third person summaries, inserted speeches and other literary inclusions, all of which help to express the viewpoint that YHWH has judges the nation of Israel and its exile was a just punishment for its apostasy.⁶⁴ Noth's

⁶⁰ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV :71.

⁶¹ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV :71.

⁶² Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV :71-72

⁶³ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:72.

⁶⁴ Cogan, *I Kings*, 97.

critics point out however, that he fails to account for the internal inconsistencies within the text. These include terminological variations and "unevenness in viewpoint".⁶⁵

Building on Noth's work, Frank Moore Cross, posits that Kings developed in two stages; prior to the exile during the reign of Josiah and then during the Exile itself. Dtr₁ was the redactor who lived during the time of Josiah. He emphasized the return to Yawhistic monotheism and the unconditional promise of the eternal Davidic monarchy; both of which go hand-in-hand with the Josianic reform. Dtr₁ also emphasizes that the sin of Jeroboam is the direct cause of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.⁶⁶ There is also a strong emphasis on prophecy and "the word of YHWH" spoken by the prophet. If the word of YHWH does not come true, then unlike true Deuteronomic prophecy it is not the word of YHWH.⁶⁷

Dtr₂ is the label given to the exilic redactor who updated the works of the first redactor. "The hopeful outlook [of Dtr₁] needed to be revised after the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the monarchy".⁶⁸ The new Dtr makes the promise of eternal kingship conditional on the people's faith and devotion to YHWH. He is therefore able to attribute the destruction of Judah based to the sin of Manasseh.

What binds the above theories together is the assumption of a pre-exilic tradition that was eventually redacted and unified during the exile. There are some scholars however, who deny that assumption. These scholars, Van Seters and others, claim that Kings was produced and written in its entirety after the exile. Its purpose then, was to "foster religious

⁶⁵ Cogan, *I Kings*, 97. See Also Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:72 regarding Smend's proposal.

⁶⁶ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:72. Cogan, *I Kings*, 97-98.

⁶⁷ Cogan, *I Kings*, 98.

⁶⁸ Cogan, *I Kings*, 97.

conformity within the postexilic" community.⁶⁹ Whether one agrees with Cross or Van Seters on the dating of Kings what is clear is that:

The Composition [of I and II Kings] as a whole gives evidence of meticulous attention to detail through unifying structure and schematization of themes; it contains a wealth of character sketches, nuanced dialogue, and dramatic scenes of a high order of literary finesse.⁷⁰

This observation about Kings with regard to composition will be the driving force behind the current reading of Elijah. While I agree with Cross and others regarding the pre-exilic existence of an Elijah tradition, what is relevant for the current study is the way in which the themes, character sketches, dialogue and scenes which appear in I and II Kings help to shape the overall picture of the prophet.

Themes in I and II Kings

Throughout Kings the Dtr,⁷¹ both explicitly and implicitly, makes it clear that the worship of YHWH and other gods is a mutually exclusive endeavor. This is demonstrated most glaringly in that *only* forty years of "history" (one-tenth of the 400 years covered) occupies almost one-third of the two books.⁷² I Kings 16:23-II Kings 12 details the rise and fall of the Omride dynasty in Israel and its defeat at the hands of Jehu. It is Omri's son Ahab who marries the Phoenician princess Jezebeel, the result of which is the royal sanctioning of the worship of Baal and Asherah alongside YHWH.⁷³

⁶⁹ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:72. Cogan, *I Kings*, 72.

⁷⁰ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:76.

⁷¹ I have chosen to use Dtr as the generic term meaning Deuteronomic Historian, which is the "editorial" voice of the text.

⁷² Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:76.

⁷³ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:77.

The battle against royal apostasy is played out on a grand stage, upon which the prophet Elijah and his successor Elisha are introduced. The message is clear; YHWH is the one true god. Elijah, and Elisha, as prophet and messenger of YHWH's word, play an important role in the overall theological framework of the Kings. They are the ones who bring the idolatrous people and monarchy to their knees. However, their success is fleeting. The kings and the people of the North return to worshipping Baal. While Elijah (through Elisha) is able to ensure the downfall of the Omride dynasty, the North is ultimately doomed. Even though Josiah (II Kings 23) eventually destroys the cultic places in Samaria, Israel's fatal flaw in the eyes of the Dtr is that the cult must ultimately be centered in Jerusalem.

The centralization of the cult in Jerusalem is another major theme.⁷⁴ Ultimately, it is loyalty to YHWH, and YHWH alone with the cultic center in Jerusalem, which is idealized in Kings. As John Gray explains, "the major interest of the Deuteronomistic compiler is at once obvious, namely first, cultic orthodoxy according to the principles familiar in the book of Deuteronomy, centered in the Temple in Jerusalem...."⁷⁵ Kings in its final form, represents the classical Deuteronomistic understanding that loyalty to YHWH, God of Israel, in Jerusalem, determines the course of history.⁷⁶ Accordingly we read in great detail the building of the Temple by Solomon and its furnishings. Furthermore, those who transgress the centrality of Jerusalem are portrayed as unforgivable sinners whose actions ultimately lead to the downfall of the kingdom.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:77.

⁷⁵Gray, *I and II Kings*, 9.

⁷⁶Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 3.

⁷⁷Jeroboam and worshipping YHWH at Bet-EL and Dan (II Kings 12:28-34).

In contrast to prophecies found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible virtually all prophecies found in the book of Kings are linked with their fulfillment in history.⁷⁸ This will be an important theme that runs through the entire Elijah cycle. Elijah is only able to prove his powers as prophet by virtue of the fact that what YHWH says (through him) is actualized in history. This includes the heavenly fire at Carmel and the ultimate doom of both Jezebel and Ahab.

Prophets, their words and their deeds fill a considerable amount of space in Kings. Most of the prophets, including Elijah and Elisha are from Israel in the north. They are the ones who rebuke the kings and the people by warning them that their infidelity to YHWH will lead to their demise. The prophets of kings "call law-breakers to order" and become witnesses to the impending punishment.⁷⁹ The word of YHWH, delivered through the prophet is ultimately fulfilled as Israel is destroyed and Judah, with its Temple in Jerusalem is laid to waste.⁸⁰

Elijah and his ministry play a central role in the overall goal and theme of Kings. It is in the Elijah cycle that all of these themes are articulated, implicitly and explicitly. Elijah is not only an agent of YHWH but an agent of the Dtr as well. He paints Elijah as a complex character representing YHWH's ability to act in history through human agency. For the Dtr, Elijah is the prototypical prophet and champion of YHWH, while his adversaries (Jezebel and Ahab) are the prototypical enemy. If the people and the Kings would only listen to Elijah and follow after YHWH's desire they would prosper. But, if they do not, then they will suffer, just as Jezebel ultimately does. The unifying themes, use of language, and overall

⁷⁸ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:77.

⁷⁹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 97.

⁸⁰ Holloway, *The Books of I and II Kings*, IV:77 see also Gay, *I and II Kings*, 11-12.

portrayal of Elijah are the driving force behind the Dtr's ability to further this polemical view of Israelite and Judahite history.⁸¹

⁸¹ See chapter entitled themes and motifs in the Elijah narrative including obedience to YHWH and fulfillment of YHWH's word.

Chapter 3: Elijah in I and II Kings

I Kings 16:29-I King 19 (The drought stories)

I King 16:29 set the stage for Elijah's entrance in the history of the Dtr. "Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel...Ahab son of Omri did what was displeasing to YHWH, more so than anyone who had preceded him." (I Kings 16:29-30) Immediately following this verse we are told of his great sins; that he took for himself a foreign wife Jezebel, that he worshipped Baal and that he built altars in Samaria. Elijah, great zealot for YHWH, will have to stand up to the king who has "done more to vex YHWH than all the kings of Israel before him."⁸² The Dtr's summary of Ahab's reign "serves as the prologue to the Elijah narratives"⁸³ and supplies the backdrop against which Elijah's ministry is based.

It is only after we are introduced to Ahab and his sins that we encounter Elijah for the first time. Immediately he confronts the king and pronounces a curse "as YHWH lives there will be no dew or rain except by my word."⁸⁴ (I Kings 17:1) With emblazoned passion and self-righteousness Elijah proclaims that there will be no water what-so-ever in the kingdom until further notice. Right at the outset Elijah is attempting to transmit and carry out the word of YHWH in order to punish the rebellious king.⁸⁵ As mentioned in the introduction however, it is striking that Elijah is not yet referred to as prophet. Furthermore, it is not even clear if he is even delivering the curse via an oracle received from YHWH or if he is simply pronouncing his own independent curse.

⁸² It is worth noting that 16:34 recounts the rebuilding of the city of Jericho under Ahab. Jericho is Elijah's final stop west of the Jordan prior to his heavenly ascension in II Kings 2.

⁸³ Robert Cohn, "The Literary Logic of I Kings 17-19," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101.3 (1982): 334.

⁸⁴ Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews* 7:3.2 claims that the drought was the year long drought described in Menander's *Acts of Ithobalus King of Tyre*. (Gray, *I and II Kings*, 378.) Whereas in Kings 18:1 and Luke 4:25 the drought is recounted to have lasted three years.

⁸⁵ Elijah is not called a prophet right away. There is a midrash that says God only proclaimed that there will be no rain and Elijah is the one who added that there would be no dew.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי הַתְּשֻׁבִּי גִלְעָד אֶל־אַחָאב חִי־הָיָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר
עָמַדְתִּי לְפָנָיו אִם־יְהִי הַשָּׁנִים הָאֵלֶּה טַל וּמָטָר כִּי אִם־לֹא דְבַרִּי

It is only after he has delivered the curse to Ahab that the "words of YHWH comes to him."⁸⁶ [וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר] Not only does the Dtr set the stage for the confrontation between Ahab and Elijah, he also sets the polemical stage for the battle between YHWH and Baal. It is only YHWH, the one true God, who can bring water to the kingdom. The first major section of the Elijah narratives from I king 17 to the end of I Kings 19 is tied together via the drought.⁸⁷

Immediately following the pronouncement Elijah is commanded by YHWH to "leave this place, turn eastward and go into hiding in the *wadi-cherith*" (I Kings 17:3), in order not to suffer for lack of food and water. There he will find water and by the command of YHWH the ravens will bring him food. This is the first of a four "hiding and feeding"⁸⁸ stories that appear in the narratives. This is also the first of many miracles associated directly with the prophet.⁸⁹ Even though he is not the one performing the actual miracle, it is none the less "miraculous" that through YHWH the ravens are able to sustain him with food. In ancient Mesopotamian culture, as scavengers, ravens were understood as ominous creatures, often depicted in battle scenes. This ancient view of the raven "underscores the miraculous nature

⁸⁶ In his article "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings." John Olley discusses at the various oracles that are delivered by Elijah that may not actually be from YHWH but rather the prophet himself. "Elijah is zealous for YHWH but his words and actions suggest that it is zeal that drives him and not always the word of YHWH." Olley concludes that the narrator in the form of Obadiah and others suggests that there other ways to serve YHWH than Elijah's zealotry. Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 51.

⁸⁷ Many scholars have argued and noted the possibility that at one time I Kings 17-19 may have been a series of independent narratives about the prophet Elijah. The drought story, as they argue, is the "loose thread" which ties together the one time independent narratives.

⁸⁸ The others are: the widow for whom he fills the jars of oil and flour, and the messenger that appears to him twice before his journey to Horeb. See chapter on motifs and themes in the Elijah narratives.

⁸⁹ There are two main types of miracles in the narratives; the ones that he performs himself and the ones that are done for him.

of YHWH's act."⁹⁰ ⁹¹ It is also important to note the fact that YHWH's words were fulfilled. YHWH told Elijah that the ravens would be commanded to feed him and so they do. The Dtr is setting his precedent in the Elijah narratives of the expectation of the fulfillment of YHWH's word and commands.

Once the food and water run out, the word of YHWH again comes to Elijah. This time YHWH commands him to go to "*Zerphat of Sidon*"⁹² (the same *Sidon* from which we are told Jezebel is from). Here again sustenance will be provided for him through the fulfillment of YHWH's words, but this time by an unnamed widow. When Elijah arrives at the town and sees a widow⁹³ he cries out to her for water, and she obliges. However when he requests from her some bread, she cries out "As YHWH your God lives, I have nothing baked, nothing but a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil on a jar." (I Kings 17:12) The widow exclaims in anguish that she has but enough to make one more meal for she and her son, and that following the meal they both will die. Having faith in YHWH's word, Elijah tells the widow to return home and make a small cake" for him and then some for her and her son. Having used up her last morsel of food and facing starvation, YHWH speaks and fulfills the promise made to Elijah. The expected miracle takes place as YHWH says "the jar of flour will not give out and the jug of oil will not give out until the day YHWH brings rain upon the ground." (I Kings 18:14) Once again the word of YHWH is fulfilled.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Cogan, *I Kings*, 427.

⁹¹ There is a *midrash* that says the ravens took the food from Ahab's own house. This was in order that he would not only suffer because of the drought but also have to provide for Elijah as well. Another *midrash* says that the food came from Jehosaphat's house because Ahab was an idolater and even the raven would not enter the house of an idolater. (*Bemidbar Rabbah* 23:29)

⁹² See introduction with regards to location and note about geography

⁹³ He may have recognized her as the widow because of the way she was dressed.

⁹⁴ Commentaries and scholar is alike over the centuries have noted in great detail the striking similarities between some of stories in the Elijah narratives with those in the Elisha cycle. The current scholarly debate revolves around the question as to which narrative is earlier, Elijah or Elisha. There are those who argue that the Elijah stories rely on Elisha, while other arguer the opposite. While this debate is out of the scope of this

In the first half of the chapter Elijah has already proven his status as messenger of YHWH's word. However, it is in the next scene that Elijah truly proves that he is a "man of YHWH". Suddenly the son of the woman falls ill until "the breath has left him." Distraught over the death of her son she blames Elijah, asking what she has done to deserve such a fate. Elijah proceeds to take the boy to his room upstairs where he lays himself on top of him and cries out to YHWH "let this child's life return to the body" (I Kings 17:21). YHWH hears and answers Elijah's plea and the boy is brought back to life.⁹⁵ It is only once Elijah is able to resurrect her son that she says "now I know that you are truly a man of YHWH and that the word of YHWH is in your mouth". (I Kings 17:24) Rather than profound gratitude for what the prophet has done, the woman expresses her faith in Elijah and the word of YHWH.⁹⁶ The "three episodes"⁹⁷ form a clear literary sequence in which the author charts the rise of Elijah's prophetic powers".⁹⁸ The Dtr, through miracles and fulfillment of YHWH's words, has "proved" Elijah's power through his relationship with YHWH. The Dtr through these stories portrays Elijah as "man of YHWH" able to deliver and follow YHWH's word and as a prophet who can elicit a direct response from YHWH as well.

paper the parallels are so striking that they must be mentioned. I Kings 17:8-16 and 17:17-24 to II Kings 4:1-7 and 4:8-37; Elijah, the widow of Zerephath, the revivification of her son and the never ending jugs of oil and flour – Elisha who multiplies the oil and the water, the revivification of the Shinamite's son. For a detailed analysis see White, *The Origins of the Elijah Legend*, 11-17. While White argues that Elijah was invention of the Jehuite kingdom to justify their usurpation of power, and therefore relies on the Elisha stories, she none the less does a thorough job of reviewing the scholarly arguments and outlining the similarities and differences.

⁹⁵ In both this story and in chapter 19 the word נָפֶשׁ plays a key role. Here Elijah asks: תָּשֻׁב־נָא נְפֶשׁ הַיָּלֵד – literally return the "life" to this boy.. In chapter 19 he asks for the opposite: קַח נְפֶשִׁי בְּיָדְךָ – for his "life" to be taken away by YHWH.

⁹⁶ Walsh, *I Kings*, 232.

⁹⁷ The three stories that appear in chapter 17 (the feeding by the ravens, the feeding by the widow and the resurrection of the boy) are loosely tied together via the larger drought story. Most scholars agree that these three episodes were at one time separate stories. However there is debate among scholars as to which are original to the prophet and which are "borrowed" from other biblical narratives and motifs. (Especially the widow story which has parallels in the Elisha narratives)

⁹⁸ Cohn, "The Literary Logic of I Kings 17-19," 335.

Chapter 18 begins with YHWH's command to Elijah to appear before Ahab in order to end the drought. Here the Dtr introduces Obadiah⁹⁹ "who feared YHWH greatly" and who protected the prophets of YHWH, whom Jezebel was killing off. The drama of what will unfold in the next two chapters begins with the editorial comments of verse 18:4. It will be her prophets whom Elijah kills after the encounter at Carmel, and it will be because of her that Elijah flees into the wilderness.

The same Obadiah, the subversive servant to Ahab, sets out with the king in search of Elijah. While on his journey, Elijah "suddenly confronts" him. In their conversation Elijah demands that Obadiah tell Ahab that "Elijah is here". Obadiah protests in fear, saying that "when I leave the spirit of YHWH will carry you off." (I Kings 18:12) From his response we learn that Elijah must have been known as one who could disappear and reappear suddenly (see introduction). At the end of chapter 18 we will discover that it is the "hand of YHWH" that allows him to travel so mysteriously. Despite his fear Obadiah tells Ahab of Elijah's presence and Ahab goes out to meet him.

"Is that you, you troubler of Israel", asks Ahab as he confronts Elijah. Ahab is referring to the drought and famine in the kingdom¹⁰⁰. The king is blaming Elijah for the severe drought and famine. Elijah immediately replies "It is not I who have brought trouble on Israel, but you and your father's house, by forsaking the commandments of YHWH and going after Baalim" (I Kings 18:18). Elijah for the first time explains the cause of the drought. It is now Elijah himself and not the narrator who condemns the actions of Ahab and

⁹⁹ Olley claims that Obadiah is a contrast to the zealous nature of Elijah's ministry and another way to serve YHWH

¹⁰⁰ We also know that there is a famine from I Kings 18:2 "the famine was so severe in Samaria". Following this verse Obadiah travels the kingdom looking for grass to keep the animals alive.

his house. The message is clear; follow the commandments and worship only YHWH and you will be fine, do not and you will suffer the consequences.

Now that Elijah has explicitly told Ahab the cause of the drought he defiantly commands the king to "summon all of Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baa and the four hundred prophets of Asherah..." (I Kings 18:19). The accusation and command serve as a transition to the confrontations at Mount Carmel among Elijah and the foreign prophets, Baal and YHWH and Elijah and the people. It is only through this confrontation that the drought will be brought to an end. Ahab complies with Elijah's request and the people of Israel gather at Mount Carmel. The understanding is that the drought cannot and will not come to an end until they all meet at Carmel. It is interesting that Ahab complies with the prophet's request. Why would the king at this point even think of following the commands of the prophet? The relationship between Ahab and Elijah will now play a key role in the narratives.

Elijah approaches the people as they gather at Carmel. He chastises them saying, "how long will you hop between two opinions?" (I Kings 18:21)¹⁰¹ The people of Israel are now faced with a choice YHWH or Baal. It may be concluded by Elijah's challenge that neither YHWH worship or Baal worship were foreign to the people. Therefore:

It is not Elijah's purpose to introduce the people to the worship of God (YHWH) an innovation, but rather to counteract and eradicate the persistent attraction of Baal-worship as a syncretistic complement to the true religion of Israel.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See Note above.

¹⁰² Benjamin Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*. (Translated by David Louvish. Jerusalem: Magnes Press The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), 406.

The people however do not answer him and in their silence he calls out "I am the only prophet YHWH left, while the prophet of Baal are four hundred and fifty men." (Kings 18:23) Yet, we know that this is not the case, after all Obadiah, we are told fed and hid the prophets of YHWH from Jezebel. However, in Elijah's mind and in his speech he is the last of the "true" prophets. He alone can bring YHWH's word to the people and the king.

The suspense builds even further as the people remain silent. Elijah, still unable to get the people to make the right choice and see the error of their ways proposes a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal.¹⁰³ They are each to take two young bulls, cut them into pieces, lay them on an altar and invoke the name of their god. Who ever responds with fire and consumes the sacrifice "wins". The people for the first time respond to Elijah saying; "good", that is they accept the challenge. The prophets of Baal call out to Baal but receive no answer. As they are "hopping around" Elijah mocks them telling them to shout louder. Of course, they are unable to summon Baal's heavenly fire. The message is clear; Baal is neither the god of rain nor the god of fire. It is only a true prophet like Elijah who can summon the one true god.

After their unsuccessful attempt, Elijah draws the people even closer, repairs the "damaged altar,"¹⁰⁴ erects a twelve stone altar, lays the wood out on the altar and then places the bulls on the wood. His actions to this point are very deliberate. He has already shown that the words of the prophets of Baal and the words of Baal for that matter are not true. Yet, the people have still not responded to his original question as to which god they will choose. Once the sacrifice is prepared, he has it dowsed with water, not once but twice, as if to say, "I

¹⁰³ The contest at Carmel is also taking place between Baal and YHWH. In the Ancient Near East Baal was seen as the god of rain and various other elements. Yet, YHWH is the one who truly controls the rain and not Baal.

¹⁰⁴ Elijah's repair of a damaged altar is significant in that there must have been something for him to repair in the first place – Also Elijah's actions as a priest see thesis (See 1 Kings 19:10)

will show you how truly powerful and true YHWH is, he can consume even the waterlogged sacrifice with fire.”

Elijah here for the first time is called prophet “the prophet Elijah came forward...” (I King 18:36) The prophet draws closer to the altar and calls out to YHWH saying that he has done all that has been asked of him and that YHWH must answer him by consuming the sacrifice. On command, the fire¹⁰⁵ of YHWH comes down from heaven and consumes the sacrifice and the altar.¹⁰⁶ Elijah has defeated the prophets of Baal, proving that he alone is the true prophet and that YHWH alone is the true god. Once again YHWH answers Elijah’s plea, just as YHWH did when he asked for the widow’s son to be revived. Both times he requests a response in his own behalf. For the widow it is so that she will not suffer on his behalf, and at Carmel it is because he is a faithful servant of YHWH. This “call” and “received response” is in direct contrast to the non-responsiveness of the prophets of Baal. In both cases YHWH is responding directly to Elijah for a very specific purpose and for a specific reason.

Like the widow then, the people recognize Elijah as prophet only after he has performed his “miracle” (or after YHWH has responded to his request). They now respond to his initial questions by crying out; “YHWH alone is god, YHWH alone is god”. (I Kings 18:39) He has, for the moment accomplished his mission, they have chosen YHWH over Baal. Having now “proved” YHWH’s supremacy and his prophetic abilities, Elijah orders the prophets of Baal to be seized. The people, like Ahab, comply with a request from Elijah, and seize the prophets, “not letting a single one get away”. (I Kings 18:40) The capture and

¹⁰⁵ There are other examples of heavenly fire coming down from heaven. Lev 9:24 as the tabernacle is consecrated, II Chronicles 7:1 and I Chronicles 21:26.

¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the altar which existed and was rebuilt by Elijah was totally consumed to emphasize the theme of centralization of the cult in Jerusalem.

killing of the prophets seems to be in retaliation for the killing of the prophets of YHWH by Jezebel. It must be noted however, that we do not read that YHWH commanded Elijah to kill the prophets. This action¹⁰⁷ of Elijah demonstrates a vengeful and violent side to the prophet that we will see again in II Kings 2.

Afterwards, Elijah climbs back up to the top of the mountain where he crouches low to the ground and puts his face between his knees.¹⁰⁸ It seems as if Elijah has resorted to a meditative-prayer position in order pray for the end of the drought. Although we are not told that he actually prayed, it is clear that there was some delay to the end of the drought. Elijah's servant makes seven trips until he returns with a report of a rain cloud coming from the west. Could this be yet one more request that YHWH fulfills in behalf of Elijah? The cycle is now complete and the drought is over. As the rain comes Ahab rides off to Jezreel and "the hand of YHWH comes upon Elijah"¹⁰⁹ (I Kings 18:46) as he "runs" in front of the chariots all the way to Jezreel.

In just two chapters Elijah has mediated YHWH's word, bringing and ending a drought, rebuked a king and his people for their infidelity to YHWH, brought a child back to life, brought down fire from heaven, performed a miracle over oil and flour, proved the truth and power of YHWH as the one true god, won a battle despite being out numbered 450 to 1, killed in the name of YHWH, and miraculously traveled great distances. "The narrative thus far has been hammered into a remarkably smooth linear story which recounts the life of the prophet Elijah as the instrument through which YHWH battles the forces of Baal"¹¹⁰ We can

¹⁰⁷ See Walsh, *I Kings*, 255.

¹⁰⁸ Cogan, *I Kings*, 444.

¹⁰⁹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 445 on hand of YHWH.

¹¹⁰ Cohn "The Literary Logic of I Kings 17-19", 343.

begin to see thus far, how through the Elijah narrative, the themes discussed above, that are central to the Dtr and his understanding of history, are being played out.

After Elijah's victory, achieving victory over the prophets and subdual of Ahab and the people, Jezebel sends Elijah a message threatening to kill him. In fear Elijah flees to Beer-Sheba, which is in Judah, and eventually wanders into the wilderness. Elijah is now running away from the root cause of the king's apostasy, his foreign wife Jezebel. Depressed he cries out to YHWH "Enough" "take my life for I am no better than my fathers." For the first time Elijah is unsure of himself, he is depressed, afraid. Once again he makes a request of YHWH, this time to take his life. This is a clear break in how the prophet has been portrayed thus far. There is no reason that Elijah wouldn't think that YHWH would answer his plea to take his life, it seems that Elijah has reached his own end.¹¹¹ Yet, this time his plea goes unfulfilled. As he lies down under a bush, he is awakened by an angel. Yet again he is fed miraculously while in hiding. Twice an angel comes to him commanding him to eat and drink the food and water that appears by his head. The second time he is told that he must eat in order to have enough strength to travel the 40 day and 40 night journey¹¹² to the mountain of YHWH, in the wilderness, at Horeb.¹¹³ Elijah makes the journey to the mountain of YHWH and spends the night in a cave. There he encounters YHWH who asks "why are you here"? To which he responds "I am moved by the zeal for YHWH, the Lord of

¹¹¹ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet", 38. Perhaps this is a parallel to Moses' plea that he was unable to handle the people alone in Num 11:14-15.

¹¹² The parallels between the Moses narratives and the Elijah narratives are striking. Is Elijah a second Moses? Some (like White) claim he is and other (like Olley and Childs) claim that he is not. Yet, as White points out it seems that there are "reformulated Mosaic traditions [that] dominate the Elijah legends." White, *The Elijah Legends*, 3. The similarities with Moses however, are less exact in nature than those with Elisha. Some of the most striking similarities occur in I Kings 19, when Elijah flees to the desert and has a direct encounter with YHWH. Elijah and Moses are both able to appoint their successor, and both have unknown burial places. See White, *The Elijah Legends*, 4-10.

¹¹³ There have been some who claim that the mention of Horeb in this passage is a late insertion meant to juxtapose Sinai (the Moses tradition). While this seems highly unlikely, the placement of Horeb seems almost out of place in the current context. Is Horeb the actual mountain or is it the location of the Mountain of YHWH?

hosts.” Elijah professes his zeal for YHWH for the first time, and we discover that he was not as successful as we might have thought. Elijah claims that he is there because “the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword, I alone am left and they are out to take my life.” (I Kings 19:10) A very different picture than what was painted for us in Chapter 18. Elijah claims that he is fleeing not from Jezebel, as we were led to believe but from the very same people who had just proclaimed “YHWH is God, YHWH is God”! Elijah, in his responses to YHWH focuses on himself; “I am the only one left”, “I am zealous for YHWH”, “they seek to take my life”.¹¹⁴ (An indication of the composite nature of the narrative.)

Elijah has come to the mountain of YHWH seeking protection from the ones whom he thought were his allies. Elijah is unprepared for the people’s return to their old ways. There is a sense that a new climax is building to the story we thought was over.¹¹⁵ The new climax takes shape in *this* Horeb theophany. YHWH commands Elijah to “Come out” and “stand on the mountain before YHWH”. As Elijah exits the cave, the earth quakes, great winds and fire ensue. But YHWH is not in any of these great spectacles, rather YHWH is in the “Still small voice”¹¹⁶. This is in stark contrast to what the people and the prophet learned at the battle of Carmel. YHWH is not (only) in the heavenly fire brought down to consume the sacrifice. Elijah finally receives YHWH’s response, in the “still small voice” Elijah immediately recognizes YHWH and wraps himself in his mantle, and again YHWH asks him why he is there, and he responds with the same answer as before.

¹¹⁴ Olley, “YHWH and His Zealous Prophet”, 40.

¹¹⁵ Cogan, *I Kings*, 456.

¹¹⁶ Here there is a striking contrast between the silence of Baal and the voice of YHWH. Furthermore there is a striking contrast between the Carmel story and the Horeb story.

YHWH then commands Elijah to go back the way he came and gives him his new charge. Elijah is commanded to anoint Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel and anoint his successor Elisha as prophet. Elijah leaves for his journey and along the way encounters Elisha who becomes his attendant.¹¹⁷ This brings the first section of the narratives to an end. Having failed to bring the people and the monarchy completely back to YHWH, his divine task is to now be "king-maker". Elijah is no longer able to bring the people and the king back to YHWH through miracles, and will now be on a mission to install a new monarchy that will overthrow the idolatrous Omride dynasty and lead the people back to YHWH.

It is again clear that Elijah is the vehicle through which the Dtr emphasizes the theme of the supremacy of YHWH's words and what happens when one transgress the ultimate sin of worshipping another god. YHWH is the master of history and it is through Elijah and later Elisha that YHWH's words will come to pass. A complex picture of the prophet is beginning to emerge by the end of chapter 19. His zeal for YHWH is renewed, but his confidence is shaken, and with the command to appoint a successor his ministry will soon be drawing to a close. But first he will have to confront Ahab once again and condemn Jezebel to death.

I Kings 21 Naboth's vineyard and the death of Ahab and Jezebel:

After a brief hiatus Elijah returns to the scene, this time to prophesy the violent death of Ahab and his queen Jezebel. Once again Jezebel, the epitome of all that is wrong with the royal house takes center stage. Yet, this time it is not her idolatrous ways to which the prophet protests, rather, "she is the corrupter of Israel's laws and morals through her

¹¹⁷ Here Elijah does not anoint Elisha yet as his successor. It is only in II Kings 2, after Elijah's ascent to heaven does Elisha pick up the mantle of Elijah. There is a striking similarity between Elijah-Elisha and Moses-Joshua. Both Joshua and Elisha are called "attendants" and are both appointed as successors to prophecy, unique to their stories in the Bible.

domination over Ahab and the elders of Jezreel.”¹¹⁸ Jezebel subverts the law of the land, manipulating her husband, the court and the people. Her action, as we will see are in direct conflict with the notion of, who according to YHWH owns and controls land.

I Kings 21 tells the story of the murder of Naboth¹¹⁹ at the behest of Jezebel, after he refused to hand over his vineyard to the king. The story begins with Ahab's approach to Naboth, asking to acquire his land for the purpose of having a vegetable garden. In exchange for his land, Ahab offers a better vineyard or if he would prefer, to pay him the price of the land. Naboth refuses the King's request saying that “YHWH forbid that I would give up to you what I have inherited from my fathers”. (I Kings 21:3)¹²⁰ Ahab returns to the royal house and tells Jezebel about his encounter with Naboth. In despair he takes to his bed “turns his face” and refuses to eat. At this point Jezebel takes over, moving into action in order to fulfill the promise that she will acquire the “vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite”. In a series of events, Jezebel, in the name of Ahab brings Naboth in front of the elders and the nobles on a false charge of “reviling both king and god”¹²¹. Through the testimony of two “scoundrels” he is convicted, sentenced and killed. Having no heirs (see II Kings 9:26 “the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons) to inherit his land, Ahab takes possession of the vineyard.

Immediately following this affair, the word of YHWH comes to Elijah and the end of Ahab and Jezebel's reign is foretold. (It is interesting to note that until this point, there is not explicit criticism of Ahab or Jezebel by the Dtr. It is only through the prophecy of doom that

¹¹⁸ Cogan, *I Kings*, 484.

¹¹⁹ Some scholars such as Martin Cohen and Judith Todd, argue that Naboth represents a landed aristocracy that was in direct conflict with throne. Ahab's alliance with Phoenicia was what that allowed him to exploit the elite class that existed in the kingdom. Martin Cohen in his class “*History of Biblical Israel*” claimed that Elijah and Naboth represent an “old guard” while Ahab and his supporters represent the “new guard”. His claim is that this is the underlying cause of the Jehuite revolt, the clash between the “old and the new”.

¹²⁰ The king's desire to acquire the land contradicts the theology that YHWH alone is the one who can decide land ownership and acquisition and that land is only passed down from one generation to the next. Naboth's refusal to just hand over his land to Ahab implies opposition to the legitimacy of the throne itself.

¹²¹ *Elohim* and YHWH

Elijah is about to pronounce that it is revealed explicitly that what they had done was wrong. Furthermore, as was already noted, the condemnation has nothing to do with worshipping Baal.) The prophecy of doom can be broken down into three parts: YHWH's instruction to Elijah (vv 17-19), Elijah and Ahab meet (vv 20-24) and Ahab's surrender (vv 27-29).¹²²

YHWH tells Elijah to go and confront the kings saying "Would you murder and take possessions? In the very place where the dogs have lapped up Naboth's blood, the dog's will lap up you're your blood too" (I King 21:19). There is an "echo of YHWH's commandments at Sinai that enjoined against murder, coveting a neighbor's property and bearing false witness."¹²³ The word of YHWH is clear, and the task of Elijah is explicit, seek out the king and tell him of his impending doom. The reason given for the king's fate is that he murdered Naboth unjustly. However, there is no mention of Jezebel.

Elijah finds the king to deliver YHWH's message, and is greeted as "my enemy"¹²⁴. Elijah, who was once an ally to the king, running in front of his chariots after Carmel, now is explicitly called enemy. Yet, the words that Elijah delivers are not exactly what YHWH had commanded his to say:

21 הַנְּנִי מִבִּי אֵלֶיךָ כָּעָה וּבְעֵרְתִּי אֶחְכִּיךָ וְהִכְרַתִּי לְאַחֲאָב מִשְׁתֵּינִי בְּקִיר וְעִצּוֹר וְעִזּוֹב בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל : 22 וְנָתַתִּי
אֶת־בְּיֹתְךָ כְּבֵית גִּרְבָּעַם בְּרֹנֶבֶט וּכְבֵּית בַּעֲשָׂא בֶן־אֲחִיזָה אֶל־הַכְּעַס אֲשֶׁר הִכְעַסְתָּ וַתַּחֲטֵא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל :
23 וְגַם־לְאִיזָבֵל דֹּבָר יְהוָה לֵאמֹר הִקְלָבִים יֵאָכְלוּ אֶת־אִיזָבֵל בְּחַל יִזְרְעֵאל : 24 הִמֵּת לְאַחֲאָב בַּעִיר יֵאָכְלוּ
הַקְּלָבִים וְהִמֵּת בַּשָּׂדֶה יֵאָכְלוּ עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם :

(I Kings 21:21-24)

¹²² Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 396.

¹²³ Cogan, *I Kings*, 486.

¹²⁴ Throughout the narrative Elijah is referred to as: prophet, man-of-YHWH, a hair man, troubler and Tishbite. As is discussed throughout each name has a certain meaning based upon the context in which it used. He most frequently referred to as "Elijah the Tishbite."

First, Ahab's household is to be completely destroyed and the Omride dynasty will come to an end, whereas YHWH had only told Elijah of Ahab's demise, but not the end of his kingdom. Secondly, there is a new reason given for the prophecy, "doing evil in the sight of YHWH" (which may mean the unjust murder of Naboth, but it is unclear here and can only be assumed knowing the original words of YHWH to Elijah.) and "leading Israel to sin". The focus of Elijah's message is not the murder of Naboth at all; in fact he doesn't even mention Naboth. Elijah adds to the prophecy the fate of Queen Jezebel who will be devoured in the field. Finally, we must observe that the message is delivered, in the first person. It can be assumed that Elijah is speaking on behalf of YHWH, but this is not usually the case and it is not stated explicitly. This reminds us of the way in which he pronounced the curse in the first person in chapter 17. It however, is clearly the will and word of YHWH in that it stands up to the test, that is, it actually takes place. (See II Kings 9) After receiving the prophecy, Ahab seemingly repents for his sins by tearing his clothing and putting sackcloth on his body. YHWH relents in the face of the penitence of the king and declares that the disaster will not come in his life time but rather in his son's time. In the end the word of YHWH has already been declared and can not be changed, but it can however, be mitigated. The story of Ahab's repentance however, in all likelihood was a theological justification as to why Ahab survived longer than he "deserved to." Ahab, fate was sealed according to YHWH and Elijah as a result of his deeds. However, as we learn later in II Kings 20, he survives in spite of the doom oracle. Therefore, it must have been his repentance which saved his life and therefore pushed off the fulfillment of the prophecy into the days of his offspring.

This episode, like the other Elijah stories has been the subject of source critical scrutiny. There are various claims among scholars as to the stories' connection to what preceded it and what is to come in II Kings. How much of the story is connected directly with the doom prophecy pronounced by Elijah?¹²⁵ At first glance then, "Elijah appears here in a moralistic role." The doom of the house of Ahab is a punishment not for idolatry but for the spilt blood of Naboth." (At least according to YHWH's words delivered to Elijah)¹²⁶ Elijah's role seems to "provide proof that religious and cultic motifs can not be completely detached from social and moral notions." Furthermore "the denunciation of Ahab's behavior in the sharpest of terms by Elijah...kept the matter alive until the word of YHWH was fulfilled"¹²⁷, when the violent death of Jezebel is reported in II Kings 9:30-33, and Joram Ahab's grandson is killed in II Kings 9:23 at the hands of Jehu, the new king whom YHWH commanded Elijah to anoint.

Yet if we look a little more closely at the chapter we can see the importance of the editorial comments made by the narrator. While Elijah is indeed condemning the murderous and unscrupulous action of Ahab and Jezebel, it is the editor who brings it back into the realm of idolatry. Elijah then once again is a vehicle for the Dtr's view of history and worship of YHWH. While the initial cause of the prophecy may have been the Naboth affair it is ultimately his betrayal of YHWH that will lead to his downfall and the rise of the new Jehu dynasty.¹²⁸ The prophecy brings him one step closer to being the king-maker that

¹²⁵ See Cogan, *I Kings*, 485.

¹²⁶ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 398.

¹²⁷ Cogan, *I Kings*, 486.

¹²⁸ There is a link between Naboth, Elijah and the Jehu revolution - for a complete discussion on this see - White, page 34 and Renteria page 90. "Jehu uses Naboth's death in his campaign against the Omrides suggest that it had become a cause celebre" Cogan, *I Kings*, 486.

YHWH commanded him to be at the end of chapter 19. The story of Naboth and the doom prophecy adds to an already complex picture of the prophet.

II King 2: Elijah and the King's men¹²⁹

II Kings opens with the historical note: "after Ahab's death, Moab rebelled¹³⁰ against Israel. Ahaziah¹³¹ fell through the lattice work of his upper chamber at Samaria and was injured". However it is at the end of I Kings where the Dtr editorializes his feelings towards the new king, which will play an integral role in how he and his men interact with Elijah. "He [Ahaziah] did what was displeasing to YHWH, following in the path of his father and mother, and in the path of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He worshipped Baal and bowed down to him he angered YHWH, god of Israel, just as his father had done." (I Kings 22:53-54).¹³² The crown, under Ahaziah, continues in support of non-yahwistic worship, and is clearly still leading the people to "sin".

Ahaziah, injured and unsure of his fate, commands his men to inquire after "*baal zebub*, the god of Ekron"¹³³ whether he will live or die. Suddenly the scene shifts and an angel of YHWH speaks to Elijah concerning the fate of the king. Elijah is commanded to go,

¹²⁹ In this story Elijah uses the fire of YHWH as a weapon to defeat the king's men. Fire plays a key role in the Elijah narratives; a heavenly fire consumes the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, a fire appears to Elijah at Horeb, but YHWH is not in the fire, and Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot.

¹³⁰ This account of the Moabite rebellion under King *Mesha* does not appear until Chapter three right after the Elijah narratives end.

¹³¹ Ahaziah reigned only one year (852-851 BCE). The only real historical note about his reign in Kings is that the Moab rebelled against him. As a result of his death, his brother Jehoram who succeeded him was left to handle the rebellion. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 22.

¹³² The "artificial separation" of the narrative proper from the editorial comments at the end of I Kings is a result of the LXX's division of Kings into two separate books. Robert L. Cohn *2 Kings*. (*Beit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 3. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 22.

¹³³ II Kings 1:2. The Hebrew *zebub* means flies, "Lord of the flies"; reading it this way is supported in LXX and Josephus. This reading may point to a corruption of the original name "*baal-zebul*." *Zebul* appears as an epithet in Ugaritic texts meaning prince (i.e. "Prince-Baal"). The corruption could have remained to underscore the disgust and contempt. Volkmar Fritz. *I and II Kings A Continental Commentary*. (Translated by Anslem Hagedorn. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 230. *Baal-zebub* is also referred to in the NT, where he is equated with Satan. Ekron was one of the five Philistine cities on the border of the territory settled by Israel in Josh 13:3. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 25.

greet the messengers of the king, who are chasing after an oracle from *baal-zebug*, and chastise them (and therefore the king) for their mission. "Is it for a lack of god in Israel that you are going to inquire of baal-zebug?"¹³⁴ (II Kings 1:3. The oracle from YHWH concludes with HWH's word that Ahaziah will indeed die of his wounds.

The Kings messengers don't make it to their destination, nor do they receive any oracle first hand. Elijah tells them the fate of the king and they return to Ahaziah and report what they have heard. The Dtr can not even allow a non-yahwistic prediction to be delivered or for that matter be received. The king's messengers, become Elijah's messengers, and therefore YHWH's messengers. The Dtr shows that seeking "after foreign gods leads to disaster."¹³⁵ The chain of events is exactly as one would expect from the perspective of the Dtr: "YHWH has his 'messenger' go to Elijah. Elijah takes the message to the messengers [of the king], who in turn communicate YHWH's words to the king".¹³⁶ Once again, truth lies with YHWH, YHWH's word and YHWH's messenger. The Dtr makes that clear from the very beginning; the king's death will be punishment for his worship of Baal-Zebub of Ekron, his "disbelief" that there is indeed a god in Israel. Elijah's struggle with the Omride dynasty and his battle against Baal worship continue.

The king receives the oracle that he requested, but not from the expected source. After hearing of his fate from the messengers, he doesn't react to the content but rather inquires after the source.¹³⁷ "What kind of man was he?" Ahaziah wants to know the manners, behaviors, and distinctive characteristics¹³⁸ of the person who intercepted his

¹³⁴ This exact phrase is repeated three times in this chapter vv 3,6 and 16

¹³⁵ Otto, "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History", 494.

¹³⁶ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet", 44.

¹³⁷ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 6.

¹³⁸ The Hebrew is *mishpat* – see Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 26, regarding the nuance of what the word *mishpatim* (Judges 13:12).

messengers. They describe him as a "hairy man,"¹³⁹ with a leather belt tied around his waist" (II Kings 1:8). This is the first time that the prophet is physically described. Yet from this description the king immediately recognizes the man to be "Elijah the Tishbite". Fritz points out that Elijah apparently could be identified by the way he dressed and his unkempt hair and that we have to presume this is what set him apart from other men of God.¹⁴⁰ If Elijah was so recognizable then why were the messengers unable to identify him? Cohn suggests the following:

The messenger's innocence serves the rhetorical purpose of placing the name of the prophet climactically in the mouth of the king. His certainty measured against their ignorance sets up the contest for domination between the prophet and king that will now develop.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, the king does not identify Elijah as prophet, but only as the Tishbite. At this point is the king even willing to recognize the prophet and the prophecy from YHWH?

The focus is now squarely on Elijah as the king sends a captain and fifty men to go after Elijah, who is sitting on a hill. The king, seemingly unconvinced as to the veracity of the prophecy and its source, sends his men to capture Elijah. The captain in the name of the king demands "Man of god (*elohim* and not YHWH)...come down!" (II Kings 1:9). Elijah's

¹³⁹ אִישׁ שְׁעָרַי is only found in this verse, see note in II KINGS commentary regarding the construct of "baal x." Robert L. Cohn in his commentary on *II Kings* suggests that this construct is an ironic contrast; the messengers on their way to encounter "the lord of flies" encounter instead the "lord of hair". Cohn, *II Kings*, 6. Baal-sear may also mean a man with long hair and a beard and perhaps a long hairy cloak. Elijah was also known to wear a "cloak", the cloak he wrapped himself in at the mountain of YHWH, the cloak he used to separate the Jordan River, and the one that Elisha inherits. When the *aderet* is mentioned in the Elijah stories it is never described as hairy. However, in Zech 13:4 "hairy mantle" does appear. Is this a reference to the mantle worn by Elijah? The same type of hairy mantle was also worn by John the Baptist (Matt 3:4). Gray, *I and II Kings*, 464. It is also interesting to note that in Gen 26:5 Esau is described as being born as if he was wearing "a hairy mantle"

¹⁴⁰ Fritz, *I and II Kings A Continental Commentary*, 231.

¹⁴¹ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 7.

responds "If I am truly a man of god, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." Indeed this is exactly what happens, twice, with the first group of men and with the second group of men. Once again Elijah is calling upon heavenly fire, but not in order to consume a sacrifice. Here, Elijah is portrayed almost as a sorcerer; sitting atop the hill bringing down fire to consume his would be captors.¹⁴² If there was nay doubt as to whether or not Elijah was truly a man of god it is certainly gone by the time the third set of men show up to bring Elijah to the king.

The third delegation arrives, and instead of attempting to capture Elijah the captain falls to his knees and acknowledges that indeed Elijah is a man of God, and begs for his life. A messenger of YHWH comes to Elijah and tells him not to be afraid, and to go with the captain. The third captain represents the only appropriate "response to the man of God as the representative of God's will".¹⁴³ Elijah comes to Ahaziah and delivers the prophecy of doom in person. Once again Elijah confronts a king face to face in order to deliver his fate. As the narrative concludes the prophecy comes true when Ahaziah dies. Elijah once again is "portrayed as an uncompromising man of God, zealous in his demand for exclusive loyalty to YHWH and terrifying in his acts of retribution."¹⁴⁴

II Kings 2:1-12 Elijah's ascent to heaven and succession of Elisha

The final narrative in the Elijah narrative serves two purposes: it concludes the Elijah cycle and it begins the Elisha cycle. This is the only time in the *Tanakh* that there is an account of prophetic succession.¹⁴⁵ "Now as YHWH was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a storm, Elijah and Elisha had set out from Gilgal." (II Kings 2:1). The miraculous

¹⁴² Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 344.

¹⁴³ Fritz, *I and II Kings A Continental Commentary*, 231.

¹⁴⁴ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 10.

activity of the prophet continues even as his ministry is about to draw to a close. From the opening lines of the narrative it is clear that Elijah's time on earth is drawing to a close and that he will not "die" like other human beings. Rather, YHWH will carry him up to heaven, his life and career will end through the "direct intervention of YHWH".¹⁴⁶ The task of appointing his successor Elisha, as he was commanded in chapter 19 seems to be at hand.

In his final days Elijah again is the wanderer! He moves from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho and eventually to the Jordan. As he makes his journey from place to place he says "Elisha, stay here" (vv 2, 4, 6). Rofé understands this command to mean that there is something special that will happen between Elijah and YHWH, "For YHWH has sent me" (vv 2,4,6) "to which no one else will witness"¹⁴⁷ Olley understands Elijah to be reluctant to hand over the mantle of his prophecy, by repeatedly sending Elisha away.¹⁴⁸ Yet, Elisha refuses to relent, and insists on following Elijah from place to place. From the outset however, it is a foregone conclusion, Elijah's life will end and his mantle will be passed. At each stop the "sons of prophets"¹⁴⁹ come out and tell Elisha that indeed his master will "be taken from you today"¹⁵⁰, but he silences them, delaying or even denying the inevitable. Elijah, the great loner and wanderer, in his final moments desires to continue his existence as an individual. Yet, he is unable to be alone, Elisha and the sons of prophets follow him from place to place, he can not and will not be alone in his final moments on earth.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Rofé, *Prophetical Stories The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible Their Literary Types and History*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 47.

¹⁴⁸ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet", 46-47.

¹⁴⁹ This is the first time these sons of prophets are mentioned in any connection with Elijah. They are however associated heavily with the Elisha narratives. They are a loosely organized set of prophets who see Elisha as their leader.

¹⁵⁰ [מַעַל רֹאשׁ] literally from your head, which expresses the relationship between Elijah and Elisha and master and servant. Cogan and Tadmor, *I and II Kings*, 32.

¹⁵¹ Weiner, *Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism*, 16.

The final stop on their journey is the Jordan. Once Elijah and Elisha arrive, the "sons of the prophets" remain at a distance and Elijah and Elisha approach the water's edge. There at the Jordan, Elijah performs his final miracle. He removes his mantle (אֶדְרֵתוֹ), rolls it up, and strikes the water dividing it into two, and the two cross over. The parallels to Moses and the Sea of the parting of the sea of reeds are striking,¹⁵² as is the appointment of a successor. However this passing of the torch takes place in private across the Jordan rather than in front of the entire people Israel. It is also a reversal of direction from Joshua 3:4, rather than crossing the Jordan into the Land, they cross the Jordan to leave the land of Israel. Elijah has now returned to his native land. This time however the miracle does not occur from the word of YHWH, but rather through the mysterious cloak which Elijah has worn since he first arrived on the scene. The cloak that defined him in his encounter with Ahaziah and in which he wrapped himself in on Horeb, now becomes the source of miraculous power. It is this cloak with which Elisha inherits the spirit of Elijah as he ascends to the heavens.

As they cross the river together they speak for the first time about Elijah's inevitable fate, the "conspiracy of silence" is broken.¹⁵³ Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him "before he is taken from him." This is also the first time that Elijah recognizes his fate as well. The matter is not out of his hands, "his reality will soon be revealed"¹⁵⁴ as he is taken to heaven. Elisha requests that a "double portion"¹⁵⁵ of the "spirit" (II Kings 2:10). The source of Elijah's abilities and his relationship with YHWH is this "spirit" of which Elisha desires double. It is the spirit which grants the prophet his authority and position. Elijah, then in his final moment is once again an agent for the Dtr. Through his action and his

¹⁵² Moses splits the sea to the left and to the right whereas Elijah splits the Jordan this way and that way.

¹⁵³ Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories*, 48.

¹⁵⁴ Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ This double portion alludes to the double portion granted to the first born in Deuteronomy 21:17.

words, Elijah points out that the spirit can not be “passed down” like the crown of a king or the estate of a father. Despite being told by YHWH that Elisha will indeed be his successor, it is ultimately YHWH alone who can “pass down” the spirit to Elisha, giving him the authority of prophet and messenger of YHWH’s word. It will only be Elisha’s ability to see Elijah’s ascent to heaven that will prove his worthiness to receive the spirit and thus take up the mantle of Elijah.¹⁵⁶

11 וַיְהִי הַמָּחָה הַלְלִים הַלֹּחַ וְנִדְבָר וַחֲנָה רָכַב אֵשׁ וְסוּסֵי אֵשׁ וַיִּפְרְדּוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיַּעַל אֵלָיוּ בְּסַעֲרָה הַשָּׁמַיִם :
 12 וַאֲלִישָׁע רָאָה וְהוּא מִצַּעֲק אָבִי אָבִי רָכַב יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפָרָשָׁיו וְלֹא רָאָהוּ עוֹד וַיַּחֲזֹק בַּבֶּגְדֵי וַיִּקְרַעֵם לְשָׁנָיִם
 קִרְעִים

The opening words of the chapter are finally fulfilled and Elijah ascends to heaven in “fiery chariot”. Elijah’s end then is not death and burial but ascent to heaven.¹⁵⁷ Elisha witnesses the event, proving that YHWH had truly chosen him to succeed Elijah as prophet. Just as the prophet’s life is shrouded in mystery so too is his death. Yet, it is not even clear if Elijah has even died. Here again we find parallels to Moses, just as Moses’ death and burial are secretive so too is Elijah’s.¹⁵⁸ Elijah however is the only “biblical personality of whom it is said that he ascended to heaven in a storm.”¹⁵⁹ It may very well be that Elijah is indeed not dead, but rather in heaven waiting to return in order to announce the “awesome terrible day of the Lord”. (Mal 3:23).

In the end, despite knowing what will happen, Elisha is left behind to cry and mourn over the “death” of his master. Elisha tears his own clothing and proceeds to pick up the

¹⁵⁶ Weiner, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism*, 17.

¹⁵⁷ Fritz, *I and II Kings A Continental Commentary*, 235.

¹⁵⁸ This is in contrast to Moses who clearly dies. According to Professor Sperling, the claim that no one knew Moses’ burial place is probably meant to refute the claim of a certain Yahweh shrine in the Nebo area that claimed to contain the tomb of Moses. According to the Moabite stone, King Mesha of Moab seized Nebo from Israel and seized some objects belonging to Yahweh. It is likely that the shrine from which Mesha sees these objects had some connection to Moses.

¹⁵⁹ Cogan and Tadmor, *I and II Kings*, 33.

mantle of Elijah, literally and figuratively. The succession is complete; Elijah's time has come to an end. The Elijah narratives of I and II Kings have drawn to a close. The circle of his life is complete, just as he suddenly appeared so too he suddenly disappeared. Elijah, zealot for YHWH, confronted and predicted the doom of two kings and a queen, performed miracles, convinced those with whom he encountered that he was a man of YHWH, summoned the fire of YHWH on two different occasions, encountered YHWH, killed in the name of YHWH, rebuilt and destroyed an altar to YHWH, wandered from place to place and ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. The narrative as we have seen presents a complex portrait of the prophet and his action. Therefore, however one understands the redaction of the narrative it is clear that the Dtr uses Elijah to underscore his polemical goal.

Historical and socio-political setting of the Elijah narratives:

The Elijah narratives describe both aspects of the conflict [between the Omride dynasty and Elijah], cultural and religious on the one hand (I Kings 17-19, II Kings 1:1-17), and social and legal on the hand (I Kings 21)."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, in order to gain a further understanding of Elijah's portrayal in the narratives and his conflict with the Omride dynasty, it is important to understand the historical backdrop against which they occur. The purpose of this section is not to debate the historicity¹⁶¹ of the Elijah narratives nor reconstruct an exact chronology and history of the Northern Kingdom based on extra-biblical sources. Rather the goal is to discuss the historiography¹⁶² of the rise and fall of the Omride dynasty as well as the political and social realities of Israel during the time of Elijah, as they are

¹⁶⁰ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 336.

¹⁶¹ Marcia C. White defines historicity as "the possibility of verifying the text's claim that the description of events which it presents is factual". White, *The Elijah Legends and the Jehu Coup*, 3. See also introduction summarizing the current debate with regards to this question.

¹⁶² "...A sequential account of events of general history. Historiography therefore deals with peoples, states and their leaders." Rofé, *The Prophetic Narratives*, 75.

the “two kings”¹⁶⁷ battled it out until Omri prevailed and became king of Israel.¹⁶⁸ (I Kings 16:21-22).

In the sixth year of his twelve year reign as king Omri moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria, which he purchased from Shemer. (I Kings 16:23)¹⁶⁹ Omri built his new capital on a previously uninhabited site, and for the first time the Northern Kingdom acquired a “permanent” and “impressive” capital, which would become the new political center of the throne.¹⁷⁰ Since Samaria was purchased and belonged to no specific tribe, the palace and the capital became a “private estate for the royal family”, falling directly under the jurisdiction of the king.¹⁷¹ The biblical account of Omri’s reign is terse (I Kings 16:15-28) in comparison to his son Ahab and the rest of the Omride kings. His military success and foreign relations are “recoverable” from extra biblical sources, which convey a “distinctly new turn in Israelite history”.¹⁷² Under Omri the new dynasty began a policy of military expansion¹⁷³, building alliances with its neighbors in an attempt to maintain an internal stability, previously unknown in the North.

¹⁶⁷ There is a possibility that the throne was divided into two during these years. There is a debate as to the actual years that this split took place, 882-878 BCE or 885-880 BCE. There is another opinion which claims that Tibni’s reign lasts no more than a few months during 886-885 BCE. Winfred Thiel, “Omri,” 5:18. See also Mordechai Cogan, “Chronology,” *ABD* 1:1010. [Chronology Tibni 882-878 and Omri 882-871 BCE.]

¹⁶⁸ Cogan, *I Kings* 418.

¹⁶⁹ Omri purchased the “hill of Samaria” from Shemer and build his new capitol on the hill and named it Samaria. Archaeological evidence shows that Samaria was inhabited between the 11th and 9th centuries BCE. The hill upon which Omri built his new capital was strategically located along the road connecting the coastal plain to the hill country. Cogan, *I Kings* 417. Shemer is an Israelite name, and according to Cogan he was nothing else more than a local land owner. Cogan, *I Kings* 418. However, Gray and others posit that since the land was purchased according to Canaanite law, that Omri must have purchased the land from a Canaanite owner. They argue that since Omri himself was a Canaanite he purchased a site that had no Israelite associations. The name *Shemer*, while Hebrew, must have either been a later insertion to provide an etiology for Samaria or a Canaanite community. Gray, *I and II Kings*, 366-67 and Winfred Thiel, “Omri,” *ABD* 5:19.

¹⁷⁰ Orlinsky, 81.

¹⁷¹ Winfred Thiel, “Omri,” *ABD* 5:19.

¹⁷² Cogan, *I Kings*, 418.

¹⁷³ Omri is mentioned in the stele of King Mesha of Moab as having a certain military success over the Moabites. (ANET 320-321). The impact left by of Omri (and his dynasty) can also be seen in that the Assyrian kingdoms referred to The Northern kingdom as *bit-Humri*, “the house of Omri” in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions until the fall of the Samaria. Jehu, the one who ultimately overthrew the Omride dynasty, is himself (mistakenly) called “son of Omri” Cogan, *I Kings*, 416 see also Gray, *I and II Kings*, 364-365.

presented in the narratives themselves. This will help us further understand how and why Elijah can be understood to be an agent of both the Dtr (presenting his version of "history") and YHWH (who according to the Dtr acts in history through messengers, prophecy and oracles).

The rise and fall of the Omride dynasty:

Elijah's ministry takes place during the Omride dynasty of the 9th and 8th century BCE. Since the time of Solomon until the rise of Omri, no one group had managed to maintain power for an extended period of time,¹⁶³ as coup d'états were the norm of the Northern Kingdom.¹⁶⁴ Omri, then, like his predecessor, came to power via a coup which took place during the siege at Gibbethon. (I Kings 16:17) The military leadership of Israel at the time refused to accept Zimri (who also came to power via a coup) as their new ruler, opting instead to appoint Omri as commander of the army^{165 166}. Once he was in position, Omri seized control and withdrew the troops from Gibbethon, and turned his attention towards defeating Zimri at his capital in Tirzah. Following his appointment and defeat of Zimri the kingdom was once again thrown into civil war. The people were divided into two; half followed Omri while the other half followed Tibni son of Ginath. For almost four years

¹⁶³ Orlinsky p. 81.

¹⁶⁴ Winfred Thiel, "Omri," *ABD* 5:17.

¹⁶⁵ 16:16 is the first time that Omri is mentioned in the book of Kings. He is identified only as "commander of the army" and not by his father, his tribal ancestry or regional home. The derivation of his name is uncertain and has led some to conclude that he may have been Canaanite, or a foreign mercenary ("...which since the time of David has formed the backbone of the Israelite army" Winfred Thiel, "Omri," 5:17), or from the tribe of Issachar because of the land he owned in Jezreel. The name Omri is also attested to in extra-biblical sources.

¹⁶⁶ "All of Israel" 16:16. This must mean all of the army appointed and not all of the people. In 16:21 it states that the people were divided into two camps, pro-Omri and anti-Omri, therefore his appointment was not unanimous. See Cogan, *I Kings*, 413.

After his death (I Kings 16:28) the work of building the dynasty as well as the completion of the capital city, fell to his son Ahab.¹⁷⁴ Ahab continued the policies already established by his father Omri, by strengthening and building the capital as the center piece of the kingdom, solidifying foreign alliances especially with the Phoenicians through his marriage Jezebel, (I Kings 16:31)¹⁷⁵ and with the Southern Kingdom of Israel calling upon the king to help in his battle with Aram (I Kings 20 and 22) and he continued his father's penchant for acquiring new land (see the story of Naboth's vineyard and his desire to go capture Ramoth-Gilead from Aram). Domestically, Ahab had to deal with the consequences of his marriage to Jezebel and the Canaanite population under his rule. In the capital of Samaria he erected a temple to Baal and Asherah (I Kings 16:32), and therefore sanctioned the worship of both Baal and YHWH at the same time. Under Ahab "a new prosperity came to the land" as have never before been seen" epitomized in the "ivory house" described in I Kings 22:39.¹⁷⁶

Thus the reign of Ahab may be seen as one during which Israel emerged from its position as under dog vis-à-vis Damascus, defending its interests on both sides of the Jordan...¹⁷⁷

The reign of Ahab comes to an end when he dies from his wounds sustained during his battle at Ramoth-Gilead with Aram¹⁷⁸ (I Kings 22:37) whereupon his son Ahaziah

¹⁷⁴ Cogan, *I Kings*, 419.

¹⁷⁵ The alliance with the Phoenicians started under Omri and the marriage most likely took place before Ahab took the throne. There was also another strategic marriage that took place between Athaliah and the prince of Judah, Joram. She is described as both "daughter of Ahab" (II Kings 8:18, II Chron 21:6) and "daughter of Omri" (II Kings 8:26, II Chron 22:2). (For a discussion on which reading to accept, daughter of Omri or daughter of Ahab See Winfred Thiel "Athaliah," *ABD* 1:512 The marriage of Athaliah to the future king of Judah is another example of the way in which the Omride dynasty solidified its relationships with its neighbors.

¹⁷⁶ Martin Cohen, "In All Fairness to Ahab: A Socio-Political Consideration of the Ahab-Elijah Controversy." *Eretz-Israel* 12 (1975): 91.

¹⁷⁷ Cogan *I Kings*, 474.

ascends to the throne. Ahaziah reigned only one year, dying of the wounds he sustained when he fell through the "lattice work of his upper chamber" (II Kings 1:2). Ahaziah's brother Jehoram takes his place on the throne just as the Moabites were rebelling against the kingdom. Just as his father had done before him, Jehoram goes to battle against Aram at Ramoth-Gilead and is injured during the battle. As a result of his injuries he leaves the battle field and returns to the ancestral home of Jezreel to recover from his wounds. (II Kings 8:29) While the king is recovering, Elisha sends a messenger to the army encamped at the battlefield in order to anoint the commander Jehu, king of Israel (II Kings 9:4-10). The messenger tells Jehu that he is the one who will bring Elijah's prophecy to fruition that the house of Ahab and Jezebel will come to an end. (II Kings 9:7-10) Jehoram finds out about the rising coup whereupon he returns to the battle field and is subsequently killed by Jehu. As for Jezebel, she too meets a bloody end when her eunuchs throw her from a palace window and her body is trampled on by horses leaving nothing to be buried. (II Kings 9:30-33) Jehu takes over the royal palace bringing a close to the Omride dynasty, which began with a military coup and was toppled with a military coup.

As we have already noted, the majority of Elijah's prophetic activity takes place during the reign of Ahab with the exception of his confrontation with his son Ahaziah in II Kings 1. To understand Elijah's relationship with the Omride dynasty its history and its ultimate demise, we must take a closer look at the Biblical account of the reign of Ahab. Expect for two chapters the entire biblical account of Ahab's reign is narrated via his relationship with the prophet Elijah. Therefore, the socio-political setting of Elijah and all

¹⁷⁸I Kings 20 and 22, which detail Ahab's capitulation to Aram and his death at Ramoth-Gilead, are the source of debate among scholars. The main question centers on whether or not the events described in I Kings 20 and 22 took place during the reign of Ahab. It is known through extra-biblical sources describing the battle of Qarqar that Omri allies himself with Syria, his one time enemy, against the Assyrians in the west. It is also known that Ahab is said to have contributed a large amount of chariots and foot soldiers.

that he was reacting against is dependent upon how Ahab (and Ahaziah) ruled the Kingdom of Israel.

Baal and YHWH worship under Ahab and Ahaziah:

Even before Ahab and Elijah meet, we learn of the Dtr's disdain for the king: "He took as wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Phoenicians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar to Baal in the temple which he built in Samaria." (I Kings 16:31-32). Herein lies the root of the "religious"¹⁷⁹ conflict between Elijah and Ahab; his marriage to the foreign princess Jezebel and her allegiance to and worship of Baal.

Presumably in order to appease his new queen, Ahab has the altars built in Samaria, therefore sanctioning the worship of another god other than YHWH. Was his building of the Temple for Jezebel perhaps any different than Solomon building the high places in Jerusalem? (I King 11:7-8)¹⁸⁰ Yet, as Uffenheimer points out he not only built the temple but he also allowed his wife to bring with her "a whole staff of cultic functionaries from *Sidon*"¹⁸¹; "four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred and fifty prophets of *Asherahh*, who ate at her table." (I Kings 18:19). He claims that there was a deliberate attempt on Jezebel's part to impose Baal worship on the masses. However, others claim that Ahab was a "syncretist",¹⁸² in that he attempted to allow multiple cultic systems to exist under his control.

¹⁷⁹ Martin Cohen in his article "In All Fairness to Ahab" points out that "neither Yahwism nor Baalism was a religion in the sense in which term religion is used in the modern Western world. He continues to say that they "provided the underpinnings for entire social systems.

¹⁸⁰ Cogan, *I Kings*, 423.

¹⁸¹ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 348.

¹⁸² Cohen "In All Fairness to Ahab," 89. See also Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, for a biased breakdown of the Alt and Fohrer arguments as well as Gray, *I and II Kings*, for a more detailed analysis of Fohrer's view.

While it is clear that Jezebel had plan for Baal worship in Israelite society and that Ahab supported her, it is not clear to what extent the king himself actually worshiped Baal. It may not be "fair" to characterize Ahab, as the narrative (Dtr) does, as a whole-hearted supporter of Baal. Martin Cohen points out several reasons that this may not be the case, among them are: Ahab gives his sons *Yahwistic* names, he does nothing to prevent the killing of the prophets of Baal at the hands of Elijah after the contest at Carmel and Omri, his father, who arranged the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel is himself not censured for his worship of Baal.¹⁸³ Whatever the case may be regarding Ahab's primary cultic loyalty, it is clear that during his reign there was state sponsored non-Yahwistic worship. Under his reign there was a policy of "religious compromise and coexistence".¹⁸⁴

It seems that Ahab himself left it up to the people as to which god to worship. During the contest at Carmel Elijah cries out the people "How long will you keep hopping between two opinion? If YHWH is god follow him, if Baal is god follow him" (I Kings 18:21).

וַיֹּאמֶר עַד־מָתַי אַתֶּם פֹּסְחִים עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַסַּעֲפִים אִם־יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים לְכוּ אַחֲרָיו וְאִם־הַבַּעַל לְכוּ אַחֲרָיו וְלֹא־עָנוּ
הָעָם אֶתֹו דְבָר

We can deduce from Elijah's demand to choose, that indeed the people were worshipping both Baal and YHWH. Ahab's seemingly ambivalent policies enabled the people in the kingdom to make a choice as to which god to follow after. In all likelihood the people were not YHWH worshippers turned Baal worshippers as result of the king's policies. Rather as a result of his actions, from building the temple to Baal and Asherah to marrying Jezebel, he continued to allow the people to choose to which god they would remain loyal. The incident at Carmel together with what Martin Cohen outlines, points towards a policy of ambivalence

¹⁸³ Cohen, "In All Fairness to Ahab," 89-90.

¹⁸⁴ Winfred Thiel, "Ahab," 1:102.

and convenience on the part of Ahab. Ahab himself, like the people, seems to waiver back and forth between Baal and YHWH, in that he follows the demands of both his wife Jezebel and the prophet Elijah. It is worth noting that reason Elijah gives for the ultimate defeat of the Omride dynasty is not its support of Baal worship but Ahab's unjust action in the Naboth affair (see below).

Even though Ahab may have implicitly supported the worship of Baal at no time does the Bible portray him as requesting an oracle from or explicitly worshipping Baal (or YHWH for that matter). Yet, this is not the case with his son Ahaziah. In II Kings 1 Ahaziah, after being injured, requests an oracle from Baal-zebul.¹⁸⁵ This is clearly a break from his father's policies, and as we have already seen resulted in the reason given for his father's death. It appears, by the way in which Ahaziah is portrayed that he is actually questioning the legitimacy of YHWH as a god in Israel. This without a doubt was a clear a break from his father's ambivalent attitude.

On the one hand stood Elijah (and the Dtr) who demanded that the belief and worship of Baal and YHWH were "mutually exclusive" religious endeavors; "the Lord God of Israel tolerates no rivals".¹⁸⁶ On the other hand there was Ahab, Jezebel and Ahaziah all of whom on various degrees did support non-Yahwistic worship. Whatever the source of the non-Yahwistic worship was under the Omride dynasty and how strenuously it was being supported by the throne, there is not doubt that it existed. During the Omride dynasty Northern Israelite religion included the worship of both YHWH and Baal. This was the ultimate root cause of the religious conflict between the dynasty and Elijah (and Elisha).

¹⁸⁵ Is this the influence of his mother Jezebel?

¹⁸⁶ Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 16.

At this juncture it would be prudent to say a word about the role of the Dtr in the narrative as it pertains to the current discussion. The Dtr as he presents the editorialized version of Israelite history has a clear disdain for the Omride dynasty. This is demonstrated in the fact that the entire reign of Omri is narrated in about one half of a chapter. The historical reality is that Omri was much more powerful and influential in than I Kings 16 and the Dtr portrays him to be. The policies set into motion by Omri and continued by Ahab including expansion of the kingdom, foreign trade and treaties through marriage, while they helped stabilize the kingdom also lead to the infiltration of foreign cultic systems. The confrontation at Carmel in I Kings 18, Rofé claims is an epic depiction of this struggle, between Baal and YHWH. During the Omride dynasty Israel "is at a crossroads in its history – a point at which it will be determined whether Israel follows the Lord [YHWH] or Baal"¹⁸⁷

Social-political background of the Omride Dynasty

The social and legal setting of the Omride dynasty is not easily understood and reconstructed from the biblical narrative. It is clear that the Omride dynasty (under Omri and Ahab mostly) brought profound changes to Israel. The question however must be at whose expense was Omri and his dynasty able to gain power? Was the class of people upon whose backs Omri came to power that rebelled against his grandchildren and supported the Jehu revolution? While these questions are not explicitly answered in the narrative there are some scholars who suggest that there may have been a "class struggle" between a traditional landed based aristocracy versus a the newly formed royal establishment.¹⁸⁸ Yet, as Martin Cohen points out "the paucity of the evidence makes any reconstruction hypothetical and

¹⁸⁷ Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories*, 195.

¹⁸⁸ Coagn, *I Kings*, 120. See also Judith A. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomic Elijah Cycle." 8-9. Todd claims that Naboth represented a dissatisfied upper class that supported both Elijah and Elisha. See II Kings 4:42, II Kings 6:32 for further references to upper class in the Elijah/Elisha cycle.

speculative. The most that can be hoped for is a reconstruction that accords with the growing store of knowledge about individual and institutional behavior"¹⁸⁹

The one story that scholars have focused on in an attempt to answer these question is the murder of *Naboth* and the confiscation of his vineyards. The monarchy under Ahab sought to take away the land from Naboth who may have epitomized a landed aristocracy; in theory he and his supporters could have apposed the king and his policies. It must be noted however that while it was the king who coveted the vineyard, Jezebel is the actual catalyst behind his murder and the ultimate usurpation of his land.¹⁹⁰

There are two ways in which to understand Ahab's opening request to Naboth. Either he king doesn't have the power or even the authority to take possession of the vineyard (I Kings 21:1-3) or as Cogan points out Ahab is hesitant to "invoke royal prerogative" in order not break from the "Israelite norm" of inherited land.¹⁹¹ No matter how one understands the motivation of Ahab's actions, Naboth's vineyard represents on some level a new non-religious/cultic conflict between Elijah and the throne. Martin Cohen and other have interpreted Naboth's story as representing a clash between the Omrides and those who appose them. Cohen raises the possibility that "Naboth's vineyard represents a paradigmatic instance of a new monarchical policy to concentrate power in its hands at the expense of the

¹⁸⁹ Cohen, "In All Fairness to Ahab," 87.

¹⁹⁰ "The story revolves around crown land acquisition vs. the right of Israelite inheritance." Judith A. Todd "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," 8.

¹⁹¹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 484. In his Biblical History class Martin Cohen pointed another possible level of conflict concerning land. One the one side is Elijah/Naboth who believing that land is passed down from father to son and that YHWH is ultimately the one who assigns land. On the other side is the pagan king who believes that as king he has the right to take possession of any land that he desires.

landed gentry."¹⁹² Elijah's indictment of the king then, is not because of his idolatrous ways, but rather because of his perversion of justice.¹⁹³

In the end, Omri and his dynasty indeed brought great change to the Northern kingdom on a variety of levels. Whether or not one agrees with the various theories regarding how to interpret the Naboth's story in relationship to class and politics in the Northern Kingdom a few things remain clear from the biblical account. First, the reason that Dtr gives for the destruction of the Omride dynasty is the "murder" and unjust taking of Naboth's vineyard. The entire affair is described as "evil in the sight of YHWH". Furthermore as has been noted in the introduction, Jezebel herself is left out of the indictment against Ahab, even though she too is destined to be "devoured in the field". The importance of the entire Naboth affair can not be ignored. Second, Naboth "haunts the scene like a ghost that will not be laid to rest,"¹⁹⁴ as he mentioned six times in three verses (21:14-16) after his death. Furthermore, the entire event becomes a rallying cry for the Jehu revolution in II Kings 9-10.¹⁹⁵ Finally, successful revolutions and coups do not happen in a matter of days, but rather take planning, support, and represent unrest among certain segments of the population. Whether this group was a landed aristocracy personified in Naboth or the "old conservative guard" led by Elijah, the Omride dynasty comes to a violent end through the death of Jehoram at the hands of the commander and new king Jehu.¹⁹⁶ This is the same Jehu who is anointed by the messenger of Elisha and who YHWH commanded Elijah to anoint as king in I King 19. Elijah, then is

¹⁹² Martin Cohen, "In All Fairness to Ahab," 92.

¹⁹³ The Dtr can not however let Jezebel off the hook completely and recognizes that Ahab acted "at the instigation of Jezebel." I Kings 21:25.

¹⁹⁴ Jerome T. Walsh, "Naboth," *ABD* 4:978.

¹⁹⁵ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 120.

¹⁹⁶ Coups in Israel may also be traced to failed foreign policy, leading army officers to "take matters into their own hands". Cogan-Tadmor suggest that the immediate cause (not the underlying cause) of Jehu's successful revolt was the "inconclusive outcome of the renewed war with Aram-Damsacus". Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 120.

inextricably linked to the Juhu-ite revolution (be it based on class struggle or religious/ cultic practices) through the story of *Naboth*. Jehu, once he takes power personifies all that the revolution represented, both religiously and culturally.

“Prophets speak to specific situation in their society”¹⁹⁷. Under the Omride dynasty Israel was in process of change, stabilization and prosperity, but at what cost and whose expense? Elijah’s ministry, his confrontation with the throne and how he is portrayed in the narrative must be understood against the backdrop what has been outlined above. Even though Elijah wasn’t completely successful in his own life time, his zealous ways are portrayed as having an important set-up role in the revolution. He is the catalyst for change, in that the Omride dynasty is defeated at the hands of the man YHWH had chosen and that very same person is the one who reforms the cultic practices of the kingdom. Elijah is at the same time a tool for the Dtr to further prove his polemical case for devotion to YHWH. The Elijah cycle “reveal a cultural and religious rupture”¹⁹⁸ perpetuated by the Omrides’ “single-minded pursuit of its political aims”.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Judith A. Todd, “The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle,” 1.

¹⁹⁸ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 335.

¹⁹⁹ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 335-6.

Chapter 4: Themes and Motifs in the Elijah Narrative

Hiding and Feeding in the Elijah Narrative:

There are four occasions²⁰⁰ in the Elijah narrative in which the prophet finds himself running or hiding from danger (the danger is not always explicit) and in need of nourishment. In each of the four occasions Elijah is miraculously provided with food and water; twice by an angel²⁰¹ (I Kings 19:3-9), once by the ravens (I Kings 17:2-6) in the wilderness, and once by the widow of *Zarephat* (I Kings 17:7-16). All four of the stories have a similar outline, but each one serves a unique purpose within the broader context of the Elijah narrative. Each time these stories appear they play a specific role in helping to define Elijah's status at that moment in the narrative. When read as a whole they also key us into an overall portrait of the prophet and his special relationship to YHWH.

The following is a general outline upon which each of the four separate stories is built:

[Elijah runs or hides²⁰²]

1. Elijah is commanded
2. Elijah follows the command
3. Food and water is provided
4. Result of Elijah eating and drinking²⁰³

²⁰⁰ I am counting the encounter with the angel in chapter 19 where Elijah is fed twice as two separate hiding-feeding incidents.

²⁰¹ When the "*malach*" [מלאך] first appears to Elijah he is just מלאך. Only in the second encounter, in verse 7, is he identified as הו"י מלאך; "angel of YHWH".

²⁰² The first two occasions he is commanded to go into hiding whereas in the second two he runs and hides on his own.

²⁰³ There are various other occasions in which food is mentioned in the narrative – see the end of the Carmel battle, the prophets eating at the table of Jezebel, and also Jehu eating after he defeats Jezebel – Note that they the Carmel and Jehu occasions are victory meals.

In order to better understand what role these stories play in how Elijah is portrayed in the context of the larger narrative we must take a closer look at why Elijah is running, who is commanding him, how is he fed, and how the story portrays Elijah's relationship with YHWH and those with whom he interacts?

The ravens feed Elijah (I Kings 17:2-6)

In the first episode Elijah is commanded by YHWH to flee to the *Wadi Cherith*, after having pronounced the curse of the drought upon the kingdom where he will be able to drink from the wadi and be fed by the ravens at the behest of YHWH. Elijah follows YHWH's command; flees to *Cherith* and is miraculously sustained by the wadi and the ravens just as YHWH had promised.

1. Elijah is **commanded** to flee by YHWH and is told about the wadi and the ravens 17:2-4
2. Elijah **follows** the command and flees to the wadi 17:5
3. The raven **feed** him and he **drinks** from the wadi 17:6
4. Elijah **survives**

The text itself does not explicitly state why Elijah was commanded to hide and flee east of the Jordan to the *wadi Cherith*. Given that the command by YHWH to hide

לך מֵאָה וּפְנִיתָ לָךְ קִדְמָה וְנִסְתַּרְתָּ בְּנַחֲל
כְרִית אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הַיַּרְדֵּן

is given directly after the curse pronouncement, *Rashi* points out the possibility that Elijah is fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel.²⁰⁴ Elijah's life must have been in danger (other than the general lack of food and water as a result of the drought), or why else would YHWH have him flee? The danger to his life is confirmed when he in I kings 18:10 and 17, when Obadiah

²⁰⁴ Miqraot Gedolot on I Kings

reports to Elijah that the King had been searching for him.²⁰⁵ Both Walsh and Cogan comment that the perhaps Ahab (and Jezebel) held Elijah responsible for the drought and that they hoped that by finding Elijah they would be able to "nullify" the harsh decree of the drought.²⁰⁶

חַוִּיתִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: ט קִנִּים לָךְ צִרְפָּתָהּ אֲשֶׁר לְצִידֹו
וַיִּשְׁבֹּתָ שָׁם הִנֵּה צִוִּיתִי שָׁם אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה לְכַלְכֶּלָּהּ:

(I Kings 17:8-9)

The command to flee given by YHWH is the first time in the narrative that Elijah receives a direct communication from YHWH. Elijah has now been established as a man who can receive divine speech from YHWH and that he is someone that YHWH wants to protect. YHWH, through direct intervention and action will "take care of his prophet."²⁰⁷ Elijah (perhaps out of fear) obeys the command to flee and journey to the wadi.²⁰⁸ He and the reader must have every expectation that the prophet will survive the drought as a result of YHWH's assurance of food and water. Here, Elijah is portrayed as an obedient prophet, following the words and commands of YHWH. His absolute obedience to YHWH's command is demonstrated in the verbatim repetition of the command in verse 5.²⁰⁹

וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ כְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּנַחַל פְּרִית אֲשֶׁר
עַל־פְּנֵי הַיַּרְדֵּן

(I Kings 17:5)

However, with what alternative is the prophet left? He can stay behind and suffer the effects of the drought and the possible persecution of Ahab, or he can follow the command of YHWH and journey across the Jordan to be fed by the ravens in the wilderness.

²⁰⁵ Cogan, *I Kings*, 426.

²⁰⁶ Cogan, *I Kings* 426. And Walsh, *I Kings*, 227.

²⁰⁷ Fritz, *I and 2 Kings*, 183.

²⁰⁸ Walsh, White and others find a parallel here to Moses in that he and Elijah both "flee eastwards to escape a king's wrath". Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 29.

²⁰⁹ Walsh, *I Kings*, 228.

Upon arriving at *Cherith* the word of YHWH is realized and the ravens feed Elijah he drinks from the wadi. Alone in the wilderness Elijah is miraculously sustained, and remains unharmed by those who pursue him and the terrible drought that has gripped the kingdom. What makes the event even more miraculous is that the ravens lavished him with meat and bread, not once but twice a day. Even in times of plenty to eat such a meal twice a day would be considered much, all the more so in the time of drought and famine.²¹⁰ Furthermore, a wadi would hardly be an "auspicious" place to hide during the time of a drought, in that it would eventually dry up and Elijah would likely not be the only person to seek water there. This only serves to reinforce the miraculous nature of the story.²¹¹

It is worth mentioning the location of the wadi, to which Elijah is told to flee, lies across the Jordan River, outside of the kingdom of Israel. Elijah himself is from east of the Jordan and may be returning to a place to which he is familiar. Elijah has moved beyond the boundaries of Israel, and in what will ultimately be a battle between YHWH and Baal, it is YHWH who decides who lives and who dies. The geography of the miracle makes the statement that Elijah's relationship with YHWH transcends the boundaries of the Kingdom and more importantly so too to do the powers of YHWH.

The first episode then portrays an Elijah who is able to receive the words of YHWH directly without any mediation. At the outset there was doubt as to authenticity of Elijah's words to Ahab regarding the drought. He delivers the oracle not as the "word of YHWH"

²¹⁰ See introduction which notes the *midrashim* as to where the ravens were able to get the meat from. Marcia White points out the possibility that the meat and bread in the morning are allusions to the evening meat and morning bread (manna and quail) of Exodus 16:8 and 12. The LXX reads that the ravens brought the bread in the morning and the meat during the evening. White, *The Elijah Legend and the Jehu Coup*, 4 FN 4. The miracle of the raven is compounded in that ravens are generally thought to be the most lawless of all animals, disdaining even care of their own young (Psalm 147:9, Proverbs 30:17, Job 38:41). Yet, of all of creatures entrusted with carrying out the divine wish to sustain the prophet in the wilderness it is the raven. Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 402.

²¹¹ Walsh, *1 Kings*, 227.

but rather in the first person, “at my bidding”. However, Elijah follows YHWH’s command, YHWH’s word is fulfilled and Elijah survives, there can be no doubt as to the special relationship that exists between Elijah and YHWH. YHWH not only speaks to the prophet but protects him as well. Yet, the word of YHWH and the miracle both take place in solitude, with no witnesses. In other words, while the reader is aware of the relationship; none of the other characters in the narrative can be certain of Elijah’s unique status. Elijah is somehow going to have to prove himself to others. It is this first “miracle” which sets the stage for a narrative replete with a variety of miracles on multiple levels.

The Widow, the jug of flour and the jar of oil (I Kings 17:7-16):

1. Elijah is **commanded** to get up and go to *Sidon* where the widow will feed him 17:8-10
2. Elijah **goes** to *Sidon* and encounters the widow and asks her to bring him food and water [She has nothing to feed Elijah - Elijah tells her not to fear- He asks her to bake him a cake from her remaining food] 17:10-15
3. Elijah eats the cake and the jar and jug are reported not to have emptied until the drought is over 17:16
4. The widow provided for Elijah and he **survives** the drought yet again,

The wadi does eventually dry up and the ravens cease to feed Elijah and he is once again forced to flee in order to survive, this time the threat is explicit – the drought. In this second miracle story Elijah is again portrayed as the faithful and obedient servant of YHWH. Once Elijah is given the command “to get up and go”, he does just that;

וַיֵּקָם | וַיֵּלֶךְ צָרְפָּתָה
וַיָּבֵא אֶל-פֶּתַח הָעִיר

He is told by YHWH that once in *Sidon*, he will encounter a widow, who by the command of YHWH will feed him. (*Kimchi* interprets the commence to flee and the initial verses of the story to mean that YHWH actually ordered there to be a miracle, because Elijah will see that the widow does not have enough to eat herself, let alone the prophet.²¹²) Upon his arrival Elijah encounters a woman, assuming that she is indeed the widow of whom YHWH spoke, he asks her for some water. Proving that indeed this is the widow, she sets out to bring the prophet some water to drink. However, he adds to his request (knowing that this is the widow and fully expecting YHWH's word to be fulfilled) asking for bread as well, to which she responds:

חַי־הָיָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אִם-יִשְׁלֵי מַעֲוָג כִּי אִם-מָלֵא כֶּף-קֶמַח בַּכֶּד וּמַעֲט־שֶׁמֶן בַּצִּפּוֹת וְהִנְנִי מִקְשֶׁשֶׁת
שְׁנַיִם עֲצִים וּבָאתִי נֹעֲשִׂיתִיהוּ לִי וְלִבְנִי נֹאכְלָנָהוּ וְנִמְתָּנוּ
(I Kings 17:12)

She and her son are starving, and on the verge of death, the word of YHWH seems destined not to be fulfilled and the prophet's life in peril. The tension created in the widow's response is what makes the ultimate outcome of the story that much more miraculous. Once again "YHWH has sent Elijah into a situation where only a miracle can supply him with sustenance."²¹³ The widow in desperation cries out to Elijah that she and her son will perish after this their last meal. However, Elijah's faith in YHWH remains strong, and he tells her not to be afraid, but to go home and make a cake for him, her son and herself.

²¹² *Miqraot Gedolot*

²¹³ Walsh, *I Kings*, 229.

Yet, one cake and some water is hardly enough to sustain the prophet, the widow and her son. Elijah has complete faith in YHWH, as he tells the widow not to be afraid. He proclaims:

אֵלֵיהוּ אֶל־תִּירָאִי בְּאִי עָשִׂי כְּדִבְרֶךָ אֲנִי עָשִׂי לִי מַשֶּׁם עֲגָה קִטְנָה בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה (וְהוֹצֵאת לִי וְלֶךְ
וְלִבְנֶךָ תַּעֲשִׂי בְּאַחֲרֶיךָ)

The widow "went and did what Elijah had asked" and as a result the "the jar of flour did not give out, nor did the jug of oil fail." The word of YHWH has now been fulfilled twice; first the widow was able to feed the prophet and second the oil and flour is reported not to have ended until the drought was over. YHWH once again is the only one who decides who will survive the drought. The widow, fully expecting she and her son will perish as a result of the drought, survive only as a result of the word of YHWH as mediated through the direct actions of Elijah.

There is a similar widow encounter found in the Elisha cycle as well (II Kings 4:1-7). While there are certainly many similarities with the Elijah story, there is one very striking difference. The miracle here is accomplished through the word of YHWH communicated by his prophet and not through "magic" as it seems to be in the Elisha story.²¹⁴ This story takes Elijah relationship with YHWH to another level; Elijah is now the mediator of YHWH's word and has the ability and the authority to repeat those words to others.²¹⁵ This story removes any doubt about Elijah's ability to mediate the word of YHWH, as the miracle of the food could only occur once Elijah himself spoke it to the widow.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Rofé, *The Prophetic Narratives*, 133.

²¹⁵ The difference between this and when Elijah delivered the news of the drought to Ahab is that in 17:1 it does not specifically state that it came to Elijah through the "word of YHWH."

²¹⁶ Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel*, 403.

YHWH and Elijah are now for the first time acting together. Whereas in the first episode Elijah passively receives food from the ravens, here he must "actively intercede to provide food for him and the widow's household."²¹⁷ The widow is the key to fully understanding Elijah's portrayal in the story and his relationship to YHWH and YHWH's word. She is at once the agent by which YHWH's promise to feed the prophet if fulfilled and at the same time submits to the Elijah's will.²¹⁸ While it is she who physically feeds Elijah, it is through her that he himself becomes part of the miracle process. The widow is the one for whom Elijah becomes mediator of YHWH's words and through whom the word of YHWH is fulfilled.²¹⁹

The geography of this story is also important to note as well. *Sidon* where Elijah encounters the widow is the kingdom from which Jezebel comes. *Sidon* is once again outside the borders of Israel and once again both Elijah and YHWH prove that their power extends beyond the borders of the Kingdom. Perhaps this story can be seen as the first contest between YHWH and Baal (in that it takes place in the native land of the person whom Elijah understands to be responsible for bringing Baal worship to the people of Israel) which ultimately reaches its climax at Carmel in chapter 18.²²⁰

The first two stories of hiding and feeding are connected on a meta-level. On the surface they both recount how the prophet was able to survive the first two years of the drought. Yet, more importantly they explain Elijah's relationship to YHWH, and his relationship to the words of YHWH. The miraculous sustenance of both stories helps to establish Elijah's special relationship with YHWH. We are gradually convinced of Elijah's

²¹⁷ White, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," 13.

²¹⁸ Cogan, *I Kings*, 432.

²¹⁹ White, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," 13-14.

²²⁰ Cogan, *I Kings*, 432.

special abilities and the expectation that YHWH's word when spoken by the prophet will be fulfilled.²²¹

The food under the bush (I Kings 19:3-9)

The final two hiding and feeding stories are linked together in the same narrative. Elijah having just killed the prophets of Baal is threatened by Jezebel and fearing for his life he flees to Judah (Beer-Sheba). Eventually he winds up in the wilderness, alone and falls asleep under a bush. As he sat under the bush in despair Elijah calls out to YHWH to take his life. Yet, as we have learned already through the other hiding and feeding stories, it is YHWH alone who has the ability to decide who lives and who dies.²²² Here for the first time the prophet's prayers are not answered and exactly the opposite takes place; Elijah lives through YHWH's intervention via a miracle.

The first appearance of food:

1. Elijah is **commanded** by a "*malach*" to "get up and eat" [but there is no food yet]

19:5

[The narrated order is reversed]

2. Elijah sees the food and water 9:6a
3. Elijah eats and drinks 9:6b
4. Elijah's prayer to YHWH to take his life is not answered but instead he survives through miraculous sustenance

²²¹ In both stories Elijah is simply referred to as Elijah. It is not until Elijah, through his prayer to YHWH, brings the widow's son back to life that she recognizes as being truly a "man of YHWH". I Kings 17:24.

²²² Elijah at this point may assume that he himself has the power over life and death. He has already brought the widow's son back to life (through prayer), and he was able to kill the prophets of Baal with no objection from the people, the king or YHWH. However, as these stories show this is not the case, it is YHWH who has the power over life and death. This may be seen as another polemic against the idea that Baal is the one who has the power over life and death.

The second appearance of food:

1. The same "*malach*" (now "malach YHWH") comes to Elijah again with the same command to get up and eat 9:7
2. [The food is provided to Elijah but this is not explicitly mentioned in the text]²²³
3. Elijah gets up and eats 9:8
4. Elijah survives again and is able to make the forty day and forty night journey to the mountain of YHWH, Horeb. 9:9

The feeding miracles in chapter 19 are woven together in order to portray Elijah in a certain light at this specific juncture in the narrative. The first encounter with the *malach* takes place as he is running away from Jezebel and her messengers who seek to deliver a message of doom. When the *malach* arrives the first time to Elijah under the bush how is Elijah to know that he is not one of Jezebel's messengers? Yet, Elijah does not question the providence of either the messenger or his motives,²²⁴ and as he has done prior, he obeys the commands given and therefore the food and water miraculously appear at his head. Yet, immediately after the miracle occurs, Elijah lies back down again. Could it be that his despair has completely overtaken him, and that despite the food provided for by YHWH he is unable to continue his duties as prophet?²²⁵

After Elijah lies back down the messenger confronts him once again, but this time the prophets' mission is made explicit. The messenger, now identified as [מלאך יהוה] gives Elijah the reason that he must eat. YHWH has a plan for the prophet, that he must eat and drink in

²²³ Radak says that he didn't eat the entire portion the first time and so the angel comes back to tell him to finish what was left so he would have enough strength to make the journey. *Abravanel* comments that the first visit was for past needs, to help Elijah recover from his self inflicted fast as he fled from Jezebel. The second feeding is for his future need; his journey to Horeb.

²²⁴ Walsh, *I Kings*, 268-9.

²²⁵ Robinson, "Elijah at Horeb," 518. "Is Elijah burnt out?"

order to have enough strength to make a journey [into the wilderness forty days and forty nights]²²⁶ The messenger's second appearance is in order to tell Elijah of his new mission.

Once again, like in the story of the ravens, Elijah is passive. Elijah need not make any provision for himself because YHWH will care for him. YHWH's special care of the prophet is stressed once again, as the food and water he needs miraculously appear according to YHWH's desire.²²⁷ At the outset of the story Elijah asks YHWH to take his life (*nefesh*) so that he may die. Previously Elijah had asked for the widow's son's life (*nefesh*) to be returned (I Kings 17:21) this time however YHWH doesn't grant this request and instead sends the messenger to sustain him. YHWH and not Elijah is the master of life and death. Perhaps Elijah only learns this in that the messenger and the food appear not once but twice.

The connection to the two previous hiding and feeding stories also exist on a linguistic level as well. The food that appears to Elijah is the same food that the widow makes for Elijah in I Kings 17:13. The water that appears to Elijah appears in a jug similar to that of the jug in the 17:12,14 and 16. Furthermore, there is a similar "command response pattern". The messenger commands Elijah and the command is repeated verbatim as Elijah follows the instruction, just as he and the widow did in chapter 17.²²⁸

Once again Elijah's special status is emphasized as YHWH miraculously sustains him. Yet, we see another side of the prophet this time, despair. Elijah while he remains loyal and obedient to YHWH, seems to be in a state of depression, and assumes that he is the one who will decide when he is finished with his mission and when he dies. Yet, this is not the case! YHWH alone has that power. Elijah must make his trip to Horeb in order to have his

²²⁶ The initial reference to the journey is merely that – a journey, in v7. However in v 8 when Elijah's trek is narrated the length of time is added as is the destination – forty days and forty nights as far as the mountain of YHWH, Horeb.

²²⁷ Fritz, *I and II Kings*, 197.

²²⁸ White, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah," 24.

encounter with YHWH and receive his final charge. This time however, he does not communicate directly with YHWH but rather with one of YHWH's messengers. There is deliberate contrast with YHWH's messenger and Jezebel's messenger. Jezebel's messengers bring death and YHWH's messenger brings life.

Elijah then through these four stories is portrayed as someone who undeniably has a special relationship with YHWH. The bonds of this relationship have no geographical limits and exist above the laws of nature. Elijah is able to receive the word of YHWH and serve effectively as mediator of that word. Elijah, however, like the people whom he confronts needs reminding of who is really in charge - YHWH. Elijah may think that he has the power to determine his own fate but he is proven otherwise when his prayer for death is unanswered in chapter 19.

Fulfillment of YHWH's words through prophecy and royal confrontation:

We have previously established that there is an expectation that the word of YHWH, mediated through the prophet Elijah will be realized. In the hiding and feeding motif Elijah's ability to not only receive the word of YHWH but be its successful mediator was demonstrated. In this section we will take a closer look at two very specific prophecy/oracles which further demonstrate Elijah's abilities. On three occasions Elijah confronts a king to pronounce the future, and each time the oracle is realized. First, he approaches Ahab and pronounces the drought and famine (I Kings 17:1), next he confronts Ahab after the murder of Naboth and delivers a doom oracle to both he and Jezebel. Finally Elijah reprimands Ahaziah for inquiring after another god and delivers yet another doom oracle prophesizing that indeed he will die from his wounds.

In this section we will examine more closely the latter of the three stories and leave the drought pronouncement for a later discussion.²²⁹ The other two oracles (I Kings 21 and II Kings 1) can be outlined as follows:

1. The king does something to anger YHWH (and therefore Elijah)
2. The word of YHWH comes to Elijah
3. The report of the word of YHWH is given to the king and the reason for the pronouncement is also given
4. The doom oracle is realized

In order to better understand how Elijah is portrayed in these two stories, we must ask who is the curse being pronounced against and why? How and when is it delivered to Elijah and then how does Elijah deliver it to the king? And finally when is it fulfilled?

Ahab's predicted Demise (I Kings 21)²³⁰:

1. Ahab through his non-action allows Jezebel to have Naboth murdered
2. The word of YHWH comes to Elijah commanding him to confront Ahab and deliver his fate to him 21:19
3. Elijah confronts Ahab and reports the doom oracle 21:20-22

[Ahab repents before YHWH and YHWH postpones the full extent of the doom prophecy until after Ahab's death]

²²⁹ The first of these oracles is when Elijah approaches Ahab and pronounces that there will be no rain or dew except as his bidding. According to the reported encounter it is unclear as to whether or not these words are coming from Elijah himself or if they are coming from YHWH. Of the three prophecies this is the most terse and most ambiguous. The portrayal of Elijah in 17:1 is markedly different than that of the other two stories. Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that the doom oracles pronounced by Elijah to Ahab, Jezebel and Ahaziah came from YHWH, while that is not the case with the drought prediction.

²³⁰ For a comprehensive argument in favor of viewing the oracle of 21:19 as a Dtr insertion to "impose prophecy fulfillment" see Patrick T. Cronauer "The Stories About Naboth the Jezreelite" 8-19.

[Ahab dies as a result of his wounds in that battle with *Aram*]

4. *Joram* is killed and the prophecy is fulfilled verbatim II Kings 9

In this episode the word of YHWH comes to Elijah unmediated directly from YHWH. YHWH informs Elijah that the deaths of both Ahab and Jezebel will be violent just like the death and murder of Naboth. However, there is a complication in the story once the oracle is delivered. Unexpectedly Ahab repents for what he has done. Yet, the word of YHWH has already been delivered and therefore must be fulfilled. In an instant Ahab is forgiven and the prophecy of doom is lifted from upon his head and will now take place after his death. He will no longer suffer such a violent death but rather his son will.²³¹

YHWH delivers two distinct messages to Elijah which in turn he must deliver to Ahab. First, "you have murdered and taken possession," and second "in the very place where the dogs lapped up Naboth's blood the dogs will lap up your blood." YHWH condemns Ahab for his unjust murder of Naboth and the illegal usurpation of his land. Elijah then becomes the mediator of YHWH's justice.²³² There is a sense of measure for measure in the description of the way in which they both will die.²³³

As Elijah approaches the king Ahab addresses him as "my enemy". Ahab had previously addressed Elijah as "*troubler*" but never enemy. Clearly there is a drastic shift in the relationship with Ahab as a result of the Naboth incident. The Naboth affair is the last straw for both YHWH and Elijah, and places Ahab in a place of no return. Elijah is no longer just a nuisance, or a trouble maker but he is now an enemy! When it comes time to

²³¹ Ahab's repentance may be a secondary insertion based on the fact that he may not have died the violent death reported to take place in the prophecy. Instead it was his son Joram whose blood is lapped by dogs and whose death ends the Omride dynasty. Gray, *I and II Kings*, 334.

²³² Walsh, *I Kings*, 331.

²³³ See the previous discussion on the entire Naboth incident.

convey the divine message to Ahab, Elijah reports the oracle in the first person. "I will make a clean sweep...I will cut you off....and I will make your house..." In his commentary Walsh points out that Elijah begins by speaking his own words but that the speech to Ahab quickly becomes divine speech.²³⁴ However, is the abrupt change to first person a further indication of the friction between Ahab and Elijah? After everything Elijah has been through as a result of the king and his queen, is Elijah turning the words of YHWH into his own?²³⁵

After Elijah delivers the news to Ahab about his impending doom, he also conveys the word of YHWH regarding the doomed fate of Jezebel. She too will meet a bloody and violent end as a result of the Naboth affair. However this time it is delivered in the third person, and Elijah claims that this too is the word of YHWH. It seems as if YHWH's anger rests with Ahab and yet Elijah is not quite willing to let Jezebel off the hook for her part in the whole affair. The prophecy however is only confirmed in II Kings 9 when Jezebel is killed and the prophecy is reported to have taken place exactly as it was delivered.

The fulfillment of the prophecy however does not take place in the lifetime of either Ahab or Elijah. It is "Jehu [whose] deeds against the House of Ahab fulfill YHWH's words delivered through his prophet [Elijah]." In II Kings 9:25,26 and 36-37 Jehu himself expresses the rationale for the death of Jezebel and the downfall of the Omride dynasty as it was reported from YHWH to Elijah and from Elijah to Ahab.²³⁶ The doom prophecy is fulfilled when Jehu kills Joram in Jezreel. Like the widow in chapter 17 the throne becomes a vehicle by which the word of YHWH is realized and through which Elijah's ability and worthiness as mediator of YHWH's word are proven. Elijah's relationship with Ahab comes

²³⁴ Walsh, *I Kings*, 330.

²³⁵ This oracle clearly represents a negative view of kingship in general and its desire to expand territorially. This fits in with the Dtr's overall understating of a king.

²³⁶ Cogan and Tadmor, *II kings*, 118.

to a conclusion as their true feelings for one another are finally expressed face-to-face. Elijah is now a true revolutionary prophesizing and therefore ensuring not only the death of the king but the end of his dynasty as well.

The Death of Ahaziah (II Kings 1)

1. Ahaziah sends messengers to inquire about his health to *Baal-zebub* 1:1-3
2. A messenger delivers the doom oracle to Elijah 1:4
3. The king's messengers and not Elijah deliver the oracle to Ahaziah. He is told that he will not recover because he went after another god and not YHWH 1:5-6 and :16
4. Ahaziah dies 1:17

In this particular story a few things are noticeably different from the encounter with Ahab. First Elijah receives the oracle from a messenger of YHWH rather than from YHWH himself. In the larger narrative of I Kings 1 "messengers" play an important role. There are the king's messengers, there is the messenger of YHWH and then there is Elijah. The king's messenger's become Elijah's messengers and therefore YHWH's messengers. Once again, as in previous stories there is a middle man whose sole role is to be a vehicle for which YHWH's word will be fulfilled. In this case it is not only Elijah (whose encounter with the king's messengers is not reported) but it is the king's messenger's themselves. Elijah co-opts their mission and turns them back towards to the king in order to complete his own mission of transmitting the doom oracle to the king. Elijah does however eventually report the oracle directly to the king. He is commanded by the messenger of YHWH once again to deliver the oracle but this time directly to the king. The king, who perhaps once doubted the veracity of

the oracle, must now believe it to be true. Indeed it is only once Elijah confronts the king face-to-face that the oracle is realized and Ahaziah is reported to have died.

Second, the reason given for Ahaziah punishment is his lack of faith in YHWH.

While this may have been an underlying cause of the doom oracle presented to Ahab after the Naboth affair, here it is made explicit. Elijah in his confrontation with Ahaziah and his men, is portrayed as a "staunch fighter for the exclusive worship of YHWH."²³⁷ YHWH alone and his one true messenger are the only ones who may hold sway over the throne. Once again YHWH alone rules over life and death and not Baal or any other god.

Finally Ahaziah dies almost immediately and in the lifetime of Elijah. The death of the king is reported in one word "*vayamot*" he died, there is no elaborate death scene or burial rather "the royal death is affirmed to be the enactment of the divine word that Elijah spoke."²³⁸ Elijah need not take any action except to deliver the message directly to the king. Once again Elijah is successful in mediating the true word of YHWH, and once again the throne is vehicle by which YHWH's word is fulfilled and Elijah's role as the true divine messenger is reinforced.

Baal vs. YHWH

The pervading theme of almost the entire Elijah narrative is the conflict between YHWH and Baal. Ultimately Elijah, Ahab, the messengers, Jezebel and others become pawns in the cosmic battle between YHWH and Baal. The victor of course is YHWH and his "general" who is none other than Elijah himself. There are various themes/motifs that pervade the narratives by which YHWH is able to prove his supremacy over Baal. Brenda

²³⁷ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 28.

²³⁸ Cohn, *II Kings*, 9.

Shaver points out that the anti-Baal polemic while overt in the context story at Carmel (as we will discuss below) is expressed more subtly throughout the Elijah narrative.²³⁹

The underlying conflict between YHWH and Baal in the Elijah narratives takes place over who has control of the natural elements. Baal in various manifestations was worshipped as a storm god who ruled over clouds, winds, thunder, lighting, rain, dew and snow.²⁴⁰ The battle lines then between Baal and YHWH are drawn over who controls the very things that were associated with Baal; rain/water, fire, sustenance, life and death. "YHWH was initially a god acting mainly in the realm of history. Owing to his growing place in Israelite religion, his sphere of influence gradually widened to eventually include what had once been the domain of Baal."²⁴¹

Elijah's ministry as we have already seen is defined by this confrontation, and as Shaver and others have pointed Carmel is the most glaring example of this confrontation and Elijah's role in it. However, where else in the narrative does this get played out leading up to and surrounding Carmel? What role does Elijah play? How does this help us to further understand the overall portrayal of Elijah the narrative?

Rain/water and sustenance:

The very first time we encounter Elijah he pronounces that there will be no rain or dew except by his word. The battle over which god controls the elements begin with the very first words spoken by the prophet. Elijah opens his drought oracle with an important phrase that sets the tone concerning the prophet and his relationship to YHWH and YHWH's status in relationship to Baal. "As YHWH lives God of Israel whom I serve." The phrase "as

²³⁹ Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 42.

²⁴⁰ J. C. De Moor., "Ba-al", *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2:187

²⁴¹ W. Herman., "Baal." *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 138.

YHWH lives" while it appears in other prophetic writings its expansion²⁴² to include the phrase "whom I serve" is unique to Elijah.²⁴³ From this introductory phrase Elijah makes two things abundantly clear. First, there can be no doubt that YHWH is indeed a living and active god and lest you think otherwise he is about to prove this through withholding the very thing which gives life, water! Second, YHWH is Elijah's god and not Baal and it is he alone whom Elijah serves, and it is "Elijah's god who alone is to be recognize!"²⁴⁴ Elijah even before he pronounces the drought is declaring that YHWH is a force with which to be reckoned.

Yet, these are mere words, and they must be backed up with action and indeed they are as the drought takes place just as Elijah had predicted. Yet, as we have noted already Elijah delivers the oracle on the first person declaring that there will be no dew or rain except as *his* bidding. While indeed one could argue that Elijah was speaking on behalf of YHWH, it is not clear from the text itself. The bringing of the drought then may at first glance be associated with the prophet's actions, seemingly giving him the divine capability to control rain/water.²⁴⁵

However, this doubt (to the reader and Elijah) is put to rest as soon as the drought begins. Immediately YHWH commands Elijah to flee and proves to the prophet and eventually the widow that indeed YHWH is the ultimate source of sustenance. YHWH alone decides who will eat and be sustained during the drought, not Elijah and certainly not Baal. Just as YHWH is able to withhold the rain and the dew so too can he provide food. YHWH will control rain, dew and food in order to "demonstrate who is responsible for the course of

²⁴² Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 30.

²⁴³ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 30. There are four occurrences of this phrase in chapter 17 and 18, all are spoken to or by Elijah. 17:1, 17:12, 18:10 and 18:15

²⁴⁴ Olley, "YHWH and His Zealous Prophet," 30.

²⁴⁵ Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, " 41.

nature."²⁴⁶ Elijah then is not the one with the divine power; rather he is merely the servant-messenger of YHWH's divine will.

This is demonstrated further during the feeding miracles which takes place during the drought. It is YHWH who commands the ravens to feed Elijah and YHWH who tells Elijah from which *wadi* he will find water. In the second miracle, while Elijah plays a more active role, the flour and oil don't give out only as a result of the divine word; "For YHWH Lord of Israel said..." (I Kings 18:14) Therefore while it may be Elijah who brings the divine will to fruition, it is YHWH alone who actually has control. "The ability of the YHWH and the *Yahwists* to secure food and water during the drought demonstrates YHWH's command of those resources"²⁴⁷ and therefore his supremacy over Baal.

Water once again plays a key role this time during the contest on Mt. Carmel after Elijah rebuilds the altar and prepares the sacrifice. Elijah commands the people to "fill four jars with water and pour it over the burnt offering and the wood." Elijah demands this to be done not once but three times, and finishes by filling the trench which he had dug around the altar, with water as well. (I Kings 18:33-35) As we have already noted this may have been done to increase the miraculous nature of the entire event which is about to take place. However, when understood in the larger context of the drought and Elijah's relationship to YHWH, the water from the four jars reinforces exactly what we have been discussing. In a drought "when water is the scarcest commodity possible...Elijah is so confident of victory he can freely waste it."²⁴⁸ Furthermore, the fire of YHWH "licks" up the water that is in the trench", demonstrating even further that it is YHWH and not Baal who controls the element of water (and fire). The entire scene demonstrates Elijah's faith in YHWH and his faith in

²⁴⁶ Fritz, *I and II Kings*, 182.

²⁴⁷ Walsh, *I Kings*, 258.

²⁴⁸ Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives," 133.

his own abilities to eventually, as he had claimed, bring an end to the drought. The use of water in this also covertly emphasizes the ultimate power of YHWH over Baal.

As the contest on Carmel draws to a close so too does the drought and just as the drought began via the actions of Elijah so too does it end. Elijah ascends Carmel once again and "prays" for the end of the drought. Seven times Elijah prays for the rain to come, and finally on the seventh try a small cloud approaches. *Abravanel* comments that Elijah prayed several times because God had not told him how the rain would come.²⁴⁹ Yet, Elijah wanted the rain to come in a way that it would be clear to all. The rain would be the final proof that YHWH alone is God, and for Elijah that final proof of YHWH's power needed to be definitive. As a result of Elijah's prayers a "heavy rain" comes and the drought ends. The rain however could not come until YHWH's supremacy had been proven and acknowledged, which it had been when the people proclaimed "YHWH is God."²⁵⁰ YHWH's words then from I Kings 18:1 had finally been fulfilled, Elijah appeared before Ahab and YHWH sent rain down upon the earth.

Elijah throughout the entire drought narrative acts as surrogate for YHWH himself.²⁵¹ It is not Elijah who controls the water and food, but rather YHWH. Elijah and YHWH are a team, proving YHWH's supremacy over Baal and YHWH control of the elements.

Fire:

Fire is another key element by which the contest between YHWH and Baal is fought over. On four occasions fire plays a key role in the narrative, twice Elijah is able to call upon

²⁴⁹ *Abravanel* continues to say that the rain was no longer the rain of mercy but rather the people had earned the rain by the choice they made at Carmel.

²⁵⁰ Cogan, *I Kings*, 446.

²⁵¹ Walsh, *I Kings*, 263.

the divine fire from heaven (I Kings 18:36-39 and II Kings 1:9-13), I Kings 19:12 makes it explicit that YHWH is specifically *not* in the fire and finally fire is the element by which Elijah is carried up to heaven (II Kings 2:11-2). Fire in the Bible can be understood as symbolic of YHWH's glory or presence (Ex 3:2, 19:18)²⁵², YHWH's protecting presence, YHWH's holiness, YHWH's righteous judgment and YHWH's wrath, as fire can be used to "punish sinners and remove impure elements from the earth",²⁵³; it is also often associated directly with lighting.²⁵⁴ In Ugaritic myth, Baal was not only seen as the god of rain and fertility but was also worshipped as the god who controlled both fire and lighting.²⁵⁵ Once again Elijah is the human agent tasked with proving YHWH's power over and control of another element, this time fire. Yet, there is more to the use of fire than proving YHWH's supremacy over Baal. Its usage and appearance in relationship to Elijah allows us to further understand the prophet and how he is portrayed in the narrative.

Fire of YHWH:

Twice in the Elijah narrative the fire of YHWH descends from heaven at the behest of Elijah and consumes something. In I Kings 18:37 the fire consumes the sacrifice and in II Kings 1, the fire consumes Ahaziah's captain and his men. The man of YHWH, Elijah, is able to call upon, produce and use the fire of YHWH. Elijah is the only human character in the Bible capable of calling down fire from heaven at will.²⁵⁶ As we take a closer look, we must ask how and why does Elijah call upon the fire of YHWH and what does this tell us further about the prophet?

²⁵² Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 45.

²⁵³ Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 55.

²⁵⁴ Ezekiel 1:13, Psalm 97:3-4 and II Samuel 22 Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 46.

²⁵⁵ Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 55.

²⁵⁶ Brenda Shaver points this out but makes note of Judges 6:11-24 when a messenger of YHWH causes a fire to appear out the rock and consume Gideon's sacrifice. Shaver makes note of the similarities between the Carmel story and this one in Judges 6:11-24. Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 45.

I Kings 18:37²⁵⁷

The culmination of the battle between YHWH and Baal and Elijah and the prophets of Baal takes place at the top of Mount Carmel. Baal has failed to answer the desperate pleas of the prophets, even as they dance around and shout aloud. Their cries fall on deaf ears. Having proven now that Baal is not god after all, Elijah must now prove that YHWH is! Elijah must not only prove to the people that YHWH is god, he must also prove to them his role as YHWH's true prophet.

Once the sacrifice is set in place and the stage is set, Elijah prays to YHWH; "Let it be known today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant and that I have done all of these things at your bidding, Answer me YHWH, answer me..." (I Kings 18:35-36). Elijah calls out to YHWH pointing out that he has been the obedient prophet, doing what was asked of him; now in front of all of Israel, he asks for YHWH to answer his plea. No sooner as Elijah is finished his pray to YHWH does the fire of YHWH²⁵⁸ come down and "consumes the offering" and "lick up the water that was in the trench."

The great contest on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, was brought to a victorious conclusion by fire falling form heaven... This impresses the people so much that they cried out YHWH alone is God.²⁵⁹

The contest then between Baal and YHWH comes to a conclusion at the top of

²⁵⁷ Note here about Elijah as High Priest in that he sets up the altar and performs the sacrifice – the rabbinic sources calling him a Priest

²⁵⁸ Bronner and Shaver both point out that the fire on Carmel can be equated to lighting. "Fiery apparitions often symbolize YHWH's presence (Ex 3:2, 19:18) as the fire attests to divine approval and acceptance of the sacrifice. Cogan, *I Kings*, 443.

²⁵⁹ Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 63.

Carmel as a result of Elijah's ability to call upon the fire of YHWH. It seems as if Elijah's pleas are answered and the prophet's of Baal are not. "By calling down fire from heaven Elijah performs a miracle which undermines a popular belief that it is Baal who has dominion over these elements."²⁶⁰ Once again it seems as if Elijah himself may be in control, but in reality he is not. Just as he needed to pray (ask YHWH) in order to end the drought and raise the widow's son from the dead so too does Elijah need to pray to YHWH to end the drought.²⁶¹ Yet, it seems that Elijah's relationship to YHWH as his prophet is strengthened in that this time the miracle takes place in front of the entire people of Israel. Elijah's relationship to YHWH is sealed in the divine fire. It is not only YHWH who stands victorious atop Mount Carmel but Elijah as well. His confidence in his abilities and protected status are inflated to the point that he seemingly takes matters into his own hands. Just after the divine fire consumes the sacrifice Elijah orders the prophets of Baal seized and "slaughters" in the valley. Just as Jezebel had slaughtered and persecuted the prophets of YHWH so too does he. However the "justice" is meted out through Elijah's word alone and not YHWH.

II Kings 1:9:13

In Elijah's encounter with the Ahaziah's captain and his men he once again calls upon the fire of YHWH. However, this time its purpose is markedly different, in that the fire consumes the men rather than a sacrifice. The first two times the king sends his men to apprehend Elijah, he was sitting on top of the hill and proclaiming "If I am a man of YHWH, let fire come down and consume you with your fifty men." Elijah has already established

²⁶⁰ Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 46.

²⁶¹ "Elijah's appeal to God to let it be known that he was God's servant and did all of these things at his [YHWH's] word corrects the impression...that he himself [Elijah] had special efficacy." Gray, *I and II Kings*, 402. It is Elijah's own words in his prayer and YHWH's answer which proves that it is not Elijah who has the power over the elements but YHWH.

himself as a "man of YHWH" and therefore one of course must expect the heavenly fire to come down and consume the men, just as Elijah has said. Elijah's confidence once again in his relationship with YHWH and in his own abilities, especially to call upon the divine fire are clear. The "*ish Haelohim*" is poised to use the "*Esh HaELohim*"²⁶² as a "lethal weapon",²⁶³ and not as means to prove the power of YHWH over Baal.

Elijah is not just the man of YHWH who can call upon the divine fire to consume a sacrifice but is a "wonderworker man of God for whom respect is due." His title as man of YHWH is now an instrument greater than the power of the king. The king and his men demand that Elijah descend but it is Elijah who causes the decent, the descent of the heavenly fire which consumes the captain and his men. Elijah is portrayed here as a divine warrior and "uncompromising man of YHWH...terrifying in his acts of retribution."²⁶⁴ Elijah's power as warrior of YHWH is now stronger than that of the king and his men.²⁶⁵ Not once but twice the fire of YHWH descends and consumes the men, proving Elijah's status as Man of YHWH and warrior. Yet, on the third attempt the captain and his men finally recognize Elijah and YHWH's power and plead for their lives, and are spared. However, Ahaziah still does not recognize YHWH's supremacy over Baal nor Elijah's status. Therefore, unlike the third delegation his life is not spared.

Indeed the underlying motif of this story is YHWH's supremacy over Baal in that once again it is YHWH and not Baal who controls fire. Yet there is a new dimension to the prophet this time. Here it his title as "man if YHWH" which commands the heavenly fire to descend rather than his prayer. Elijah's status is not and can not be questioned as this point.

²⁶² Shaver, and Bronner point out the possible play on words here.

²⁶³ Shaver, *The Prophet Elijah*, 47.

²⁶⁴ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 28.

²⁶⁵ Cohn, *II Kings*, 8-9.

Elijah, YHWH's general, uses the weapons at his disposal to ensure YHWH's victory over Baal and in turn the idol worshipping king Ahaziah. Fire here is used to further prove Elijah's miraculous relationship with YHWH.

Elijah at Horeb:

Perhaps the most famous of the Elijah stories takes place at the Mountain of YHWH, Horeb in chapter 19. In a story replete with echoes of the Moses narratives, Elijah journeys to Horeb where he encounters the famous the "*kol d'mma daqa*." After Elijah is commanded by YHWH to come out and stand on the mountain, a series of natural phenomena are reported to take place. A mighty wind, an earthquake, and a fire,²⁶⁶ yet YHWH is not in any of these occurrences. First let us consider the encounter as a continuation of the battle between YHWH and Baal and secondly let us consider what the encounter with the *kol d'mma daqa*²⁶⁷ can further tell us about how the narrative portrays the prophet and his relationship with YHWH?

YHWH has vanquished the power of Baal by his mastery of those natural elements which the pagan god was believed to control. In this chapter [I Kings 19] the polemic against paganism continues. It is true that the natural elements are often used by YHWH, but he remains beyond them, transcendent, mysterious, and obscurely perceived.²⁶⁸

Once again YHWH reigns supreme over Baal. YHWH has won the battle over life and death, fire and rain, feast and famine, all of which were thought to be the domain of Baal.

²⁶⁶ "In the theophany that Elijah was to experience, the elements precede YHWH, almost like messengers proclaiming the approach of the divine" Cogan, *I Kings*, 453.

²⁶⁷ This section is not meant to discuss the difficulties in translating the phrase *kol d'mma daqa*, for a detailed discussion on this topic see ABD and AB commentary.

²⁶⁸ Robinson, "Elijah at Horeb," 527.

Yet what Horeb does is take YHWH out of the natural and place him in the supernatural, above and beyond the natural world. The purpose is to demonstrate that YHWH possessed all the attributes of a rain and storm god like Baal, but that he existed above and controlled all of the elements.²⁶⁹

Yet, on Horeb Elijah stands alone. It seems that this time it is Elijah who needs the convincing, as all of the traditional attributes of theophany²⁷⁰ are rejected.²⁷¹ As Elijah stands experiencing the wind, the earthquake and the fire it seems as if he himself is expecting YHWH to "continue with the fireworks." Perhaps the lesson is meant for Elijah alone. It is he who must now learn that YHWH is not in all of these things but rather YHWH stands above and beyond that which is natural. Fire in this case is not used to prove YHWH's presence as it was at Carmel nor YHWH's power as it is in II Kings 1. Rather it is specifically used to prove that YHWH exists above and beyond it. The lesson for Elijah to learn is the "dramatic contrast between the silence of Baal and the voice of YHWH which is beyond and not within the elements of nature."²⁷²

What then can the encounter tell us about the relationship between the prophet and YHWH. Twice during the encounter YHWH asks Elijah "what are you doing here?" (vv 9 and 13) and twice the prophets claims that he has been zealous for YHWH and that he alone is left and that all of Israel has forsaken the covenant." The first time this interaction takes place is before the *kol dmma daqa* while the second conversation takes place immediately afterwards Elijah hears the voice. The prophet's claim of "aloneness" and the conversation

²⁶⁹ Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 63.

²⁷⁰ The coming of YHWH is always depicted as coinciding with natural event. See Exodus 19:16-18. Judges 5:4-5, Psalms 18:8-16.

²⁷¹ Fritz, *I and II Kings*, 198.

²⁷² Cohn, "The Literary Logic of I Kings 17-19," 350.

between YHWH and Elijah has led Childs to claims that the *kol dmma daqa* is not the climax of the story, as we expect, and that encounter has much to teach us about Elijah.²⁷³

Prior to his journey Elijah found himself in a state of depression, praying for YHWH to take his life. Yet, this prayer is unfulfilled and instead he is kept alive by YHWH. On Carmel Elijah saw his being the last of the prophets, his "aloneness" as something positive, yet now this was something negative a reason to die even. He is now the only faithful "zealous one" left in all of Israel. The climax then, according to Child is not the theophany but the "stern rebuke" in verse 15 by YHWH to Elijah. There YHWH tells Elijah that he is not alone and that there are "seven-thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (I Kings 19:15) Elijah's encounter with YHWH at Horeb further proves that YHWH is the one in control and that YHWH still has a mission for Elijah to complete (namely anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha.²⁷⁴) It is the will of YHWH that ultimately wins out over the will of the prophet and man.²⁷⁵

Childs and others attempt to understand Elijah's relationship to YHWH by juxtaposing Elijah's divine experiences in chapters 18 and 19. At Carmel there was a public, spectacular and violent display of YHWH's power. Whereas the Horeb encounter was personal, quite and peaceful. Childs claims that the Horeb story is about "individual faith" and "inner struggle" whereas Carmel is about "the outer battle of faith." He continues; "together they reflect the tension between the public and private struggle in which the dialectic between faith and unbelief is carried on."²⁷⁶ While I tend away from a seemingly forced modern theological reading, his point is well taken. There is a clear contrast between

²⁷³ Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives," 134-37.

²⁷⁴ Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives," 135. and Cohn, *II Kings*, 277, both claim not just a rebuke but a compromise as well.

²⁷⁵ Robinson, "Elijah at Horeb," 533.

²⁷⁶ Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narrative," 136.

the two experiences of Carmel and Horeb. The purpose of the "still small voice" is not about faith as Child claims but rather it further strengthens Elijah's personal relationship with YHWH as prophet. The *kol* by which YHWH speaks to Elijah at Horeb is the *kol* that Elijah was seeking and did not receive at Carmel.

At Carmel, the prophets of Baal "invoked Baal's name from morning until noon" crying out that Baal answer them. The answer they sought was a fire from heaven that would come down and consume the sacrifice. Yet, as they shouted the text reads "there was no sound [KOL] and no answer" (I Kings 18:26). Not only did Baal not bring fire but there was no sound, no voice! Again they shout and hop around and again there is no answer [KOL]. Elijah, when it is his turn asked YHWH to answer him, so that the people may know that YHWH is god. As a result of this plea the fire descends and consumes the sacrifice. However, who was the fire for; the people or Elijah? Surely Elijah already knew that YHWH would do as he had asked?

The *kol* then at Horeb is the real answer to Elijah's plea. The ability for Elijah to experience the "true" YHWH only serves to strengthen his relationship with YHWH. Furthermore on the level of Baal versus YHWH, it is not only YHWH who controls the elements YHWH is the only god with a true *KOL*. There is a reason that Baal did not respond with a sound, YHWH is the only god with a *KOL*. Furthermore it is YHWH's one true prophet who has the ability to experience and hear the *KOL* of YHWH.

This has by no means been an exhaustive analysis of the themes and motifs that appear in the Elijah narrative. However, what emerges from the above discussion is a more complete understanding of how the narrative portrays the prophet. Elijah is servant to YHWH as he follows the word of YHWH and the word of YHWH's messengers. He is able

to successfully mediate the word of YHWH solidifying his status as prophet and man of YHWH. Elijah is a miracle worker, in that, as a result of his intimate relationship with YHWH he is able to harness those elements that only YHWH controls and has the ability to use them to his advantage. Elijah's abilities as miracle worker however depend on his direct relationship with YHWH. Elijah's desires are often expressed through prayer and (except for his prayer to die) are always answered. The prophet is indeed as he claims to be a zealot for YHWH. There are times when we are unsure as to whether or not Elijah's zeal has gotten the best of him. One can not be sure if he is acting out of his own zealotry or if he is carrying out the will of YHWH. He is a revolutionary, a maker of kings and destroyer of kings. Finally he has an intimate and personal relationship with YHWH as demonstrated in his ability to hear and experience the *kol dmma daqa* and recognize that YHWH is not in the fire, in the earthquake nor the strong wind.

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