

**Elisha and the Double Portion Spirit:
Sign of the True Son of the Prophet (2 Kings 2-9, 13)**

Rick Wadholm Jr.
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Introduction

Elijah was a prophet 'like Moses' and becomes one of the leading figures of the book of First Kings. He is a prophet unlike the other prophets of Israel in the days of Ahab. He is a prophet of the LORD who calls for a return to the singularity of Yahwistic worship against the hundreds of prophets of Baal and Asherah. However, despite the attempts to take his life by the royal family, he successfully passes his prophetic endowment on to another: Elisha. As Elijah passes from the scene there appears a sort of prophetic family which forms around the leadership of Elisha though it is already present in the time of Elijah and always in a form of distinction from the role of Elijah and Elisha in the life of Israel.

This 'family' in the Hebrew text is called the **בני הנביאים** which has been variously translated 'guild' (NAB, NET), 'company' (NRSV), and 'group' (NLT), but most literally is translated 'sons of the prophets'.¹ The translation 'sons of the prophets' is not simply a moniker for formal affiliation in the sense of 'guild',² but instead seems to belong to the very specific literary and theological intent of the author concerning the passing of the prophetic *pater familias* of the prophets and of Israel from Elijah to Elisha.³

¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² Contra those who argue beyond the text that such a group was a formal organization of sorts that supposedly gathered around their guild leaders to be taught how to prophesy via means of meditation leading to mantic ecstatic states. For example, K. Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period* (Vol.1; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), pp. 24-25.

³ It is of note that **בני הנביאים** only occurs in 2 Kgs (2.3, 5, 7, 15; 4.1, 38 twice; 5.22; 6.1; 9.1) with the singular exception of 1 Kgs 20.35. There are similar phrases elsewhere in the OT (in 1 Sam. 10.5, 10; Amos 7.14), but none which duplicate this construct chain. W. Bergen argues that groups of prophets are consistently portrayed in the texts of Samuel and Kings in a negative light in contrast to prophets acting as

It will be argued that the Elijah/Elisha cycles⁴ in the books of Kings are intended to portray Elisha as the true son of the prophet Elijah in his inheriting the 'double portion' of the רוּחַ ('S/spirit') of Elijah (and thus to become yet further a prophet 'like Moses').⁵ Rick Moore has laid out cogent argumentation for this legitimation of Elisha's prophethood in distinction to other prophets.⁶ Yet perhaps prophetic legitimation is not simply a matter of contrasting Elisha with other prophets (including the 'sons of the prophets'), but also affirming his role as leading inheritor of the prophetic mantle of Elijah's רוּחַ.⁷

There is some ambiguity in the text concerning this double portion רוּחַ. Is this the רוּחַ of Elijah or the רוּחַ of the LORD (2 Kgs 2.9, 15-16)? The fifty sons of the prophets from Jericho who saw the miraculous return of Elisha across the Jordan admit that Elisha has received the רוּחַ of Elijah, but immediately follow this with a statement that the רוּחַ of the LORD must have placed Elijah somewhere else that they could go and find him. While this may not be a direct challenge to Elisha as endowed with the fullest authority and power of Elijah, it seems subtly to undermine it. Yet, are we to understand the text itself to distinguish whose רוּחַ Elisha has received? Must there be a choice? The רוּחַ of the LORD is

individuals who may or may not be positive. See W.J. Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism* (JSOTsup 286; Sheffield Academic, 1999), pp. 172-74. While many argue that it is this very group which preserved the Elisha cycle, this lays beyond the text as a matter of historical inquest and is not properly a literary matter in the text as preserved, on this notion see as examples: J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (2nd ed. OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970), pp. 29-30; and K. W. Whitelam, 'Elisha', *ABD* vol.2 (Ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 472-73. T. R. Hobbs provides an extended excursus on the בני הנביאים which he finally argues is a unique feature associated with the Elisha stories and that one should not offer wider notions of historical recreation of Israel (or the wider region) in the mid ninth century, *2 Kings*, WBC 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 25-27.

⁴ The use of 'cycle' with regard to Elijah and Elisha is not here intended to indicate a prehistory to the canonical text, but only a literary unit that deals primarily with each respective prophet contra such over-developed attempts at parsing the historical origins of each account in the likes of S.J. DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 116-120.

⁵ A.H. Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 381. As such, DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet*, pp.54, 56, locates this text as a 'prophetic legitimation' text.

⁶ R.D. Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories*. JSOTsup 95 (Sheffield Academic, 1990), pp. 111-117.

⁷ C. Coulot, 'L'investiture d'Elisee par Elie (1 R 19.19-21)', *RSR* 57 (1983), pp. 87-92; Whitelam, 'Elisha', p. 472.

intended to be signified throughout the text by the words of Elisha being fulfilled as earlier for Elijah. The signs of this double portion רוּחַ on Elisha therefore are intended to indicate it is also the רוּחַ of the LORD.

The specificity within the text of this רוּחַ being 'of Elijah' points to the mission and ministry of this particular prophet 'like Moses' rather than being a literary point of the writer to separate Elisha as somehow only having the רוּחַ of Elijah and not the LORD. This 'double portion' רוּחַ of Elijah concerns Elisha's prophetic (רוּחַ-empowered) ministry as the new father and judge of the prophets and Israel. This is drawn in contrast with the sons of the prophets who seem to falter at every turn to produce evidence of their own sonship with regard to Elijah, in contrast to the successful ministry of Elisha. Seventeen literary connections are drawn as evidence of this genuine eldest sonship of Elisha as new head of the prophetic family and ultimately of Israel.⁸

Why the Request for the 'Double Portion'?

Elijah has already anointed Elisha to the task of completing the judgment against Israel and the house of Ahab, but after they have miraculously crossed the Jordan River Elijah asks Elisha what he might give him. Elisha's response is to receive a 'double portion of your spirit' (2 Kgs 2.9). This 'double portion' is Elisha invoking the deuteronomic command to give the 'double portion' (פִּי־שְׁנַיִם literally 'mouth of two') to the eldest son even if he is not the most beloved (Deut. 21.17).⁹

⁸ K. Möller writes that this request for the 'double portion' means 'his prophetic succession is conceptualized in terms of sonship', 'Prophets and Prophecy', pp. 825-829 in *DOT: HB* (Eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 2005), p. 827.

⁹ E. Davies, 'The Meaning of *pl šēnayim* in Deuteronomy xxi 17', *VT* 36, 3 (1986), pp. 341-47, argues that the reading of 'double portion' is to be preferred instead of 'two-thirds' as proposed by M. Noth and H. Gunkel. Davies makes an exegetical case for the reading 'double portion' by noting the fractional nature of פִּי־שְׁנַיִם in Biblical Hebrew when another fraction is present as is the case in Zech. 13.8. However, P. Watson works to demonstrate that 'two-thirds' is the likeliest translation based on his analysis of cognate literature (Akkadian, Middle Assyrian and Nuzi) along with a question of why the writer of Deut. 21.17 and 2 Kgs 2.9 (followed by Sir. 12.5, 18.32, 48.12 and the Mishna and Talmud) did not choose one of the terms most readily

The 'double portion' has been interpreted as referring to Elisha demonstrating twice the power of Elijah via twice the number of miracles attributable in the book of Kings to Elisha.¹⁰ This conclusion is earliest noted in the Cairo Geniza text of Sir. 48.12 which reads: 'Elijah was enveloped in the whirlwind; Elisha was filled with his spirit / a doubled portion [פִּי־שְׁנַיִם] of the many signs, and wonders with every word of his mouth'.¹¹ Despite this interpretation being widely held at a more popular level and also enjoying the favor of the author of Ben Sira, it is not supported by numerous critical commentators and scholars (and for good reason).¹²

This reading fails to grasp the sense of the term 'double portion' which instead refers not to a numeric quantity so much as, following the deuteronomic code, to the firstborn's share in contrast to the other sons of that same father.¹³ In other words, Elisha is requesting that he receive the eldest son's inheritance of the רִוָּחָה which was upon Elijah.

Paul Watson, likewise, proposes that the sons' of the prophets 'function' in the Elisha cycle 'might be construed as other "sons" of Elijah. [Where] Elisha wishes to be recognized as the

meaning 'double' (*mišneh* or *šenayim*). See his article 'A Note on the "Double Portion" of Deuteronomy 21:17 and II Kings 2:9', *RQ* 8.1 (1965), pp. 70-75.

¹⁰ V.P. Hamilton mentions an early Jewish tradition 'that Elisha actually outdid his famous predecessor in working signs and wonders ("Elisha performed sixteen miracles and eight was all his master performed")' as indicating an early notion of the 'double portion' referring to twice as many miracles. However, he finds only thirteen miracles enumerated by his count (1) parting the waters of the Jordan with Elijah's cloak, (2) turning bad water to good, (3) the miracle of water in the assault on Moab, (4) provision of oil for the widow, (5) prophetic promise and fulfillment of a son to a barren woman, (6) resurrection of that same son who died, (7) curing a poisoned stew, (8) feeding a large group with a little food, (9) cleansing Naaman's leprosy, (10) floating an axe head to recover it, (11) the opening/closing of eyes, (12) prophecy of an end to the famine, and (13) raising of a dead man who was thrown onto Elisha's bones, in his *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 444-45. See also N. Levine, 'Twice as Much of Your Spirit: Patter, Parallel and Paronomasia in the Miracles of Elijah and Elisha', *JST* 85 (1999), p. 25, for the citations in the various Midrash concerning this reading of the 'double portion' in the rabbinic literature. Extending this logic to the multiplying of 'complexity' in the narrative of Elisha, Levine argues specifically that 'Elisha's miracles not only double Elijah's but seem to parallel and multiply them in their themes, elements and language,' pp. 25-26.

¹¹ The LXX and Vulgate versions do not include the second bicolon of verse 12 as found in the Geniza fragment, 'a double portion of the many signs'.

¹² H. L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel: From Ahijah to Hosea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 44; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 21; P.H. House, *1, 2 Kings*, NAC 8 (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1995), p. 258; Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 380.

¹³ Contra R. D. Patterson, '1-2 Kings' (*EBC* 4; ed. Frank Gaebelien; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 177-78.

firstborn of these “sons,” with all the rights and privileges of the firstborn duly accorded to him.’¹⁴

This ‘double portion’ thus might be considered serving as a sign of authority within the family or clan wherein the double portioned (eldest) son stands as the intended patriarch upon the passing of the father. As the ‘double portion’ son he would be immediately placed ‘second in rank to the *pater familias*’.¹⁵ In this sense, then we should understand Elisha to be asking Elijah that he might be the inheritor of the full authority of the father (Elijah) to carry forward all that the father had planned.¹⁶ In this particular case, Elisha is tasked and equipped to carry out the anointing of Jehu as king of Israel and Hazael as king of Syria in order to bring about the judgment of Israel and specifically the house of Ahab. ‘Numerous literary echoes clearly portray him as Elijah’s rightful successor’.¹⁷ Elisha, as double portioned son of Elijah, will carry forward the work of his ‘father’ in Israel.

Signs of the Double Portion Spirit

The most obvious sign of the double portion Spirit is the initial sign of Elisha seeing Elijah as he was taken up into the heavens (2 Kgs 2.10). Elijah initially seems reticent or perhaps even incapable of granting Elisha’s request for the double portion and yet the sign is given as confirmation of the Spirit endowment to enable Elisha to carry on in the power and authority of Elijah. Yet this initial most basic sign serves only to confirm the inheritance to Elisha himself. The other signs that would be given would serve to confirm the double portion to those among the prophets, kings, and all Israel.

The second sign followed quickly after this first sign. Elisha tore his own clothing in two as mourned Israel’s loss and cried¹⁸ aloud, ‘My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel’ (2 Kgs 2.12)! He then took up the prophetic hairy cloak of Elijah which had fallen to the ground upon the catching up of Elijah (v. 13). With the cloak in hand he

¹⁴ Watson, ‘A Note,’ pp. 74-75.

¹⁵ I. Mendelsohn, ‘On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son’, *BASOR* 156 (Dec.1959), pp. 38-40.

¹⁶ M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988), p. 39; Gray, *I & II Kings*, p.474; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 21.

¹⁷ J. K. Mead, ‘Elisha’, pp. 254-58 in *DOT:HB* (Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 2005), p. 257.

¹⁸ Levine, ‘Twice’, pp. 29-30, notes the pervasive use of צַק ‘to pour’ (and the similar sounding צַעַק ‘to cry’) in the Elisha cycle and connects this high usage to the similarly high usage in the building of Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 7).

returned to the Jordan River in full sight of the sons of the prophets and hit the water with the cloak. At this, the waters of the Jordan divided as they had when Elijah had done likewise at the first crossing with the on-looking sons of the prophets. The sons of the prophets had watched Elijah divide the waters with his hairy cloak and now watch Elisha do the same with the cloak of Elijah. That Elisha should receive and use the cloak of Elijah would serve as a testimony of his filling the role of Elijah to Israel. In fact, Elijah had already covered Elisha with his hairy cloak immediately after his encounter with the LORD on Horeb when Elijah had been instructed to anoint Elisha to replace him and carry out the judgment against Ahab and Israel (1 Kgs 19.16-21).¹⁹ Now Elisha permanently bears the mantle.

The third sign occurs when the sons of the prophets near Jericho who await Elijah and Elisha's return on the west bank of the Jordan refuse to believe that Elijah has truly been taken away *permanently* and *replaced* by Elisha (2 Kgs 2.15-18).²⁰ They stood and watched the same miraculous crossing by Elisha, see him with Elijah's all-too-familiar cloak and yet seem to fail to discern the presence of the רוּחַ that had been on Elijah that is now on Elisha (despite their words indicating otherwise). In their refusal to accept Elisha as proper heir to Elijah, the sons of the prophets propose to go on a search for Elijah (2 Kgs 2.16) whom they wrongly believe has been taken by the רוּחַ of the LORD and set down somewhere else.

Though Elisha initially dismisses their proposal, he eventually relents. They return after three days without finding him. In line with Deut. 21.17 one might surmise that this is true because the one with the רוּחַ of Elijah (and thus Elijah himself) is among them. They should have no need to look elsewhere. And though they initially recognize this they just as quickly seem to reject it as conclusive as indicated by their oppositional request. Their

¹⁹ Levine, 'Twice', pp. 45-46, makes an observation that Elijah at Horeb (חרב) had been shown the 'sword' (חרב) in the hand of both Hazael and Jehu against the house of Ahab, but Elisha is never described as having a 'sword'. Instead, he proposes that Elijah bequeaths the mantle to carry out his calling of judgment.

²⁰ P.H. House, however, believes that 'Elisha's repetition of the act [of using the cloak to separate the waters of the Jordan and cross over]...confirm in their minds that Elisha is truly Elijah's successor', *1, 2 Kings*, p. 258.

search should have led them to conclude otherwise. It did not. Yet even in their seeming rejection of Elisha in the place of Elijah as 'father' they still defer to his authority for their errant quest.²¹

As Elisha carries on his prophetic patriarchal ministry, the sons of the prophets of Jericho who had just witnessed the miraculous return of Elisha apparently lack the ability to care for the inhabitants of their city. The water of Jericho is described as 'bitter' and thus making the inhabitants sick and the land 'unfruitful' (2 Kgs 2.19-20). Elisha arrives in the power of the Spirit of Elijah to 'heal' (רפא v.21) the water of Jericho with a dash of salt thrown into the water and the word of the LORD spoken and thus to end the sicknesses and miscarriages it was causing as a permanent healing of the water of the land (2 Kgs 2.21-22). The word of the LORD was with Elisha as with Elijah before him (cf. 2 Kgs 1.17) who 'healed' (רפא) the altar on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18.30) and restoring life to the land by the returning waters.²²

As Elisha continued in the retracing of his earlier journey with Elijah, he came up toward Bethel and was encountered by a band of young lads²³ on the road. This motley crew of youth takes to mocking the prophet, yelling: 'Go up, baldy! Go up, baldy' (2 Kgs 2.23)! One might assume they are referring to his head (and many translations have added such a reference: ESV, JPS, KJV, NAB, NAS, NIV84, NKJV, and NRSV). However, the text seems to indicate something besides the numbering of hairs on his head. 'Baldy' (NET, NIV11, NJB, and TNIV) follows the Hebrew more closely and allows for the literary connection back to Elijah in 1 Kgs 1 who is immediately known by King Ahaziah for being 'hairy' when the king questions his servants who the man was that prophetically confronted them on the road to seek other gods (v. 8). The literary connection is striking: Elijah is recognized for being 'hairy' and Elijah's 'double portion' son is mocked as 'baldy'. Could it be that these youths of Bethel (another city known to be home to sons of the

²¹ Bergen, *Elisha*, pp. 60-61.

²² Levine, 'Twice', p. 34.

²³ Young lads seems a preferable translation of the Hebrew which occurs in several other places (1 Sam. 20.35: the lad is sufficiently old enough to run and fetch arrows in a field; 1 Kgs 3.7: Solomon considers himself such; Isa. 11.6: still old enough to shepherd; 2 Kgs 5.14: to describe the restored skin of Naaman) which similarly do not seem to suggest 'little children' as some have read this text (with the possible exception of Hadad in 1 Kgs 11.17). On this reading see Ellison, *The Prophets*, p. 47.

prophets) are specifically rejecting Elisha as the prophetic son of Elijah rather than offering commentary on his receding hairline?²⁴ This story ends with Elisha cursing them 'in the name of the LORD' and two bears coming out from the woods²⁵ to maul 42 of them. This offers another link to Elijah, the 'man of God', calling down the 'fire of God'²⁶ from heaven on the two captains with their 50 soldiers sent up the hill to reject his status as prophet in 2 Kgs 1.9-14. A significant contrast is that Elijah is told to 'come down' while Elisha is told 'go up', yet in both cases each is in turn being rejected as the prophet of the LORD and each answers the bands of antagonists with a divine sign of judgment.

The fifth sign of Elisha's special sonship came in the form of unexpected watering of the land in 2 Kings 3. Elijah had earlier played his role in halting the rain on Israel until the time that the LORD declared it would rain (1 Kgs 17.1). Elisha is called upon to inquire if the LORD will grant water (as a true prophet of the LORD) just like Elijah and even with noting his immediate relationship to Elijah (2 Kgs 3.11-12). In both cases the word of the LORD declares the unseen water is coming (1 Kgs 18.1, 41; 2 Kgs 3.12, 16) as the prophets patiently await the provision of the word (Elijah by praying seven times: 1 Kgs 18.42-44; Elisha by calling for a harpist: 2 Kgs 3.15). Elisha proves himself to be the true prophet of the LORD and inheritor of the Spirit of Elijah.²⁷

In 2 Kings 4, a widow of one of the sons of the prophets receives miraculous provision of oil until the immediate need of paying debtors is met with sufficient provision for her and her two sons (vv. 1-7). Similarly Elijah had earlier met the needs of a widow (this one at Zarepheth of Sidon) and her son by the provision of ceaseless oil and flour until the need was no longer present (1 Kgs 17.7-16). While Elijah performs his miracle in the home of a widow in Baal's territory, Elisha performs his miracle in the home of a son of the

²⁴ Gray, *I & II Kings*, p. 480; Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, p.382-381. Though Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 24, believes this refers to a natural baldness which seems far less likely despite the preference for such a reading in the English translations noted.

²⁵ The Hebrew for 'from the woods' (מִן־הַיַּעַר) in 2 Kgs 2.24 offers a wordplay with the young lads coming 'from the city' (מִן־הָעִיר) in the previous verse.

²⁶ A wordplay occurs in this passage (2 Kgs 1.12) where Elijah is called the 'man of God' (אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים) and declares that the defense of his prophethood is 'fire from God' (אֵשׁ־אֱלֹהִים).

²⁷ The motif of 'firstborn' as primary inheritor of the father is actually continued in the account of the king of Moab in 2 Kgs 3.27. King Mesha offers his 'firstborn son who was to succeed him as king' as a sacrifice which ends the siege.

prophets of the LORD. Elijah's miracle proves the LORD's ability to provide for a widow and an orphan in the place of Baal's failing. Elisha's miracle proves he is the double portion son of the prophet Elijah in contrast to the sons of the prophets who apparently cannot provide for one of their own.

The raising of a dead boy serves as a seventh sign. Elisha goes to Shunem and is cared for by a wealthy woman who has no son. The man of God prophesies the birth of a son that finds fulfillment only to be met by the boy's untimely death (2 Kgs 4.17-20). Elisha is on Mount Carmel²⁸ when he hears of the death and finally arrives at the home, he finds the boy in the prophet's bed. He offers prayers to the LORD and 'stretched himself out' (יגהר vv. 34, 35) on the boy two times: the first time the boy's body warmed, the second time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes (2 Kgs 4.32-37). Elijah before him had similarly raised a dead boy. In the case of Elijah, he 'stretched out' (יתמדד 1 Kgs 17.21)²⁹ on the boy (who also had been laid on the prophet's bed) three times as he called on the LORD before the boy was finally raised (1 Kgs 17.17-23). In the Elisha account, Gehazi (the servant of Elisha) cannot raise the dead boy despite being sent by Elisha, but is raised by Elisha himself in the same manner as Elijah raising the widow's son. Gehazi is never named a 'son of the prophets', yet he is certainly a servant of a prophet who fails to carry out the task which only Elisha as double portion son of Elijah apparently can.

Elisha returns to Gilgal in a time of famine and there meets with sons of the prophets (2 Kgs 4.38-41). One of the sons of the prophets sent to gather ingredients for a stew ends up picking a poisonous gourd and adding it to the stew. Unaware, the sons of the prophets begin eating the stew only to realize too late that 'there is death in the pot' (2 Kgs 4.40). The sons of the prophets call Elisha 'man of God' an epithet regularly used for Elijah and somehow conceived as distinguishing themselves from him. Elisha has flour added to the pot as a miraculous elixir against the poison. Should we not surmise that sons of the

²⁸ There are a couple of literary affinities between this account and the Elijah cycle that Levine, 'Twice', p. 32: The Hebrew phrase **וְחִי־יְהוָה אִם־אֶעֱזֹבְךָ** as the affirmation of Elisha to Elijah (2 Kgs 2.6) and as the verbatim affirmation of the Shunnamite to Elisha (2 Kgs 4.30) and, second, both include the location of the respective prophet at 'Mount Carmel' (1 Kgs 18.19, 20; 2 Kgs 4.25).

²⁹ Elijah had earlier 'bowed down' (יגהר) on Mount Carmel to pray for rain (1 Kgs 18.42).

prophets should have been able to distinguish safe foods from poisonous or at least to cure the poison as Elisha does? Instead the sons of the prophets falter where Elisha succeeds.

Not only can Elisha cure the poisoned food of the sons of the prophets of Gilgal, but he also miraculously multiplies food in the same location (2 Kgs 4.42-44). Elisha commands the man from 'Baal Shalishah' (בעל שלשה) donating the twenty loaves of 'freshly ripe grain' (ברמל) to give it to the people gathered to eat. The man refuses on the grounds that there are a hundred men present. Elisha persists even noting that there would be left-overs after all had eaten. Exactly as Elisha predicts, the food multiplies to exceed even the feeding of the hundred 'according to the word of the LORD' (v. 44).³⁰ The sons of the prophets at Gilgal stand by as Elisha provides for members of the house of Israel. The text offers literary echoes of the work of Elijah on 'Carmel' (ברמל) confronting the prophets of 'Baal' (בעל) with the 'three' (שלש) times of pouring the water over the sacrifices and expecting the miraculous provision of fire from heaven which fulfills the call by exceeding all expectations (1 Kgs 18.20-38).³¹

Elisha also alters the future course of Aram apparently as a precursor to the judgment of the house of Ahab entrusted to Elijah at Horeb. The commander of Aram's armies, Naaman, reticently receives healing from leprosy in the Jordan River at the instruction of his Israelite servant girl's advice to seek the prophet of Israel, Elisha. In fact, Elisha performs this healing in order that Naaman the Aramean might 'know that there is a prophet in Israel' (2 Kgs 5.8). Not only does Naaman become convinced of the genuine prophethood of Elisha, but he also commits to the singular worship of the God of Israel, YHWH. This would serve as a precursor that indeed the LORD would fulfill His plans given to Elijah to judge Israel and the house of Ahab.

³⁰ Bergen, *Elisha*, p. 67, argues that the 'word of LORD' spoken by Elisha is never affirmed as the LORD's, but negatively is fulfilled as 'according to the word of Elisha'. This seems to miss the point being made in this paper that Elisha is being affirmed and thus the fulfillment 'according to the word of Elisha' is not a denigration of Elisha in distinction to Elijah, but instead an affirmation that just as Elijah before him, so now Elisha speaks for the LORD and it is accomplished.

³¹ As noted in Levine, 'Twice', p.34.

As an eleventh sign, Elisha is again with the sons of the prophets near the Jordan River (2 Kgs 6.1-7) which some have read as a return by the sons of the prophets to the very location of Elijah's departure.³² In this account, the sons of the prophets function as lesser equals of Elisha with regard to saying they gather to meet with *him* (v. 1), desiring *his* permission to go and gather materials to build a larger facility (v. 2), and finally requesting *him* to also join them (v. 3). As it happened, one of the sons of the prophets lost his axe head in the river while chopping a tree. Instead of functioning with the power of a prophet and retrieving the lost axe head, he calls to Elisha, his 'lord', for help (v. 5). Elisha recovers the head by casting a stick onto the water over where it had fallen and the axe head floated to the surface for the son of the prophets to fetch it. Again, Elisha demonstrates his headship over the family of prophets.

The writer of Kings moves the narrative to an undisclosed time when Aram has taken to attacking Israel (who was ruled by an unnamed king). The LORD reveals the maneuvers of Aram to Elisha who informs the king of Israel. At every turn Elisha knows what is coming and keeps Israel from destruction. The king of Aram attempts to capture Elisha at Dothan by night with a large force of horses and chariots, yet 'horses and chariots of fire' create an overwhelming guard for Elisha (2 Kgs 6.17). Initially Elisha's servant could not see these. In a similar manner, it seems the sons of the prophets could not see the 'chariot of fire and horse of fire' that passed between Elijah and Elisha near the Jordan (2 Kgs 2.12).³³ One can only assume these are the very same noted as passing between Elijah and Elisha as the whirlwind snatched Elijah away. The servant of Elisha requires divine enablement to see this. Rickie Moore mentions, 'Noticeably lacking among the parallels of the servant's heavenly vision ... is any mention of an army. Can it be that Elisha himself is filling this role?'³⁴

In the very next moment divine blindness comes over the Aramean army by the prayers of Elisha where he is able to lead them right into the capital city of Samaria. The Aramean eyes are opened by the prayers of Elisha and realize where they have been taken. The king of Israel eagerly asks of Elisha, 'Shall I kill them, father? Shall I kill them' (v. 22),

³² Levine, 'Twice', p. 36 n. 20, citing 'Abravanel to 6.2'.

³³ Levine, 'Twice', p. 41.

³⁴ Moore, *God Saves*, p. 89.

whereupon Elisha replies that they should not kill them, but instead prepare a feast for them and return them home. This led to a temporary hiatus in the attacks on Israel (v. 23). It is striking that the king of Israel should defer so distinctly to the authority of Elisha and even call him 'father' given the ever tense relations of Elisha to the Omride dynasty.³⁵ In the extended account of the Former Prophets there has already been a link between questioning who the 'father' of a 'prophet' was in the proverbial saying about Saul as he prophesied in the company of prophets (1 Sam. 10.11-12). Perhaps this question might also be asked of Elisha.

In the course of time, Elisha prophesies famine for Israel that would last seven years, though this famine would apparently not affect the land of the Philistines (2 Kgs 8.1-2). The Shunammite woman whose son was raised was protected from this famine by the word of Elisha to her. In similar fashion, the widow of Zarephath was protected from the drought in the days of Elijah by obeying the word of the LORD through His prophet.

In direct fulfillment of the charge to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kgs 19.15), Elisha carries on the calling to anoint the next king of Aram (2 Kgs 8.7-15). Although Elijah had been commanded to 'go back the direction he had come and go to the Desert of Damascus ... to anoint Hazael king over Aram', we encounter Elisha doing exactly this in the place of Elijah. One would have expected Elijah immediately to carry this task out, but in the providence of time, Elisha acts in Elijah's stead when years later Ben-Hadad inquired, via his servant Hazael, of Elisha (who had travelled to Damascus) if he would recover from his illness. Hazael's address to Elisha calls Ben-Hadad Elisha's 'son' (v. 9). Could it be that Elisha was counted the 'father' even of Aram? By word of the LORD Elisha tells Hazael that the king would recover from his illness, but would die and Hazael would replace him as king of Aram and the one who would bring judgment upon Israel (vv. 10-13). As double portion son of Elijah, Elisha continued to father his people Israel as kingmaker and national judge. The implied author seems intent to convey that Elisha is indeed Elijah's direct heir.

Further, Elisha anoints the next king of Israel, Jehu son of Nimshi, who had been also included by name in the instructions to Elijah at Horeb (2 Kgs 9.1-13; 1 Kgs 19.16). Elisha sends one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu the next king that he might be the hand

³⁵ Perhaps this might suggest this account is out of sequence with the surrounding text and speaks of some other king who was not Omride, but belonged to the house of Jehu.

of judgment upon the house of Ahab. Though carried out by a prophet, a son of the prophets, the work of Elisha is recognized by those with Jehu (2 Kgs 9.11). Elisha's words to Jehu concerning the judgment of Ahab's house and Jezebel are the very words of Elijah to Ahab and Jezebel following their murder and robbing of Naboth (2 Kgs 9.8-10; 1 Kgs 22.21-23): the whole house of Ahab will perish as the houses of Jeroboam son of Nebat and Baasha son of Ahijah before him and Jezebel would be devoured by dogs at Jezreel.³⁶

In the deliverance of Israel from Aram the 'horses and chariots of fire' are noted as protectors of Elisha. Some years later in his final days, Elisha has been so associated with these 'horses' and 'chariots' that he even becomes known as 'the chariots and horsemen of Israel' according to Jehoash, king of Israel (2 Kgs 13.14). Not only does the king pronounce him the 'horses and chariots of Israel', but now emphatically calls him, 'My father'. In fact, these words at Elisha's death bed are the very ones he had cried all those years before at the taking of Elijah in the whirlwind (cf. 2 Kgs 2.12). Now at the end of his life, Elisha is the confessed father and judge of Israel, but with his passing no successor is found even while the double-portion functions post mortem to raise the dead.³⁷

³⁶ Minor variants occur between the two passages with one example being Elijah's referring to Jezebel being devoured by dogs 'by the wall of Jezreel' (1 Kgs 21.23) while Elisha states it will be 'on the plot of ground at Jezreel' (2 Kgs 9.10).

³⁷ Bergen, *Elisha*, p. 56; and Levine, 'Twice', pp. 41, 45. Gray picks up on this idea and notes that 'whereas the authority of Elisha gave the stamp of final authenticity to the traditions of his older contemporary Elijah, no single great figure did the same for him, but in their very zeal to enhance the reputation of Elisha the dervish fellowships actually impaired it by their emphasis on miracles for its own sake', *I & II Kings*, p. 466.

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