

“MAN OF GOD” IN ELIJAH AND ELISAH’S STORIES

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Abstrak

Tidak ada tokoh dalam Perjanjian Lama yang paling sering dijuluki “Abdi Allah” (Ibrani:) selain dari Elia, khususnya Elisa, nabi penggantinya di masa monarki Israel. Kisah kedua tokoh tersebut terdapat dalam 1-2Raja-Raja, kitab yang termasuk dalam apa yang biasa disebut oleh para ahli sebagai Sejarah Deuteronomistik. Sejarah tersebut mengalami redaksi sedikitnya dua kali, yakni sebelum dan sesudah pembuangan. Tidak ada kata sepakat di antara para ahli mengenai kualitas apa yang hendak diungkapkan dengan julukan tersebut. Satu hal yang menarik diperhatikan adalah bahwa julukan “Abdi Allah” tersebut dipakai hanya dalam teks-teks yang muncul sesudah masa pembuangan. Dipakainya julukan tersebut kepada Musa yang dalam Ul 18 dipandang sebagai “model” (*prototype*) nabi, menguatkan pandangan bahwa julukan “Abdi Allah” dalam kisah-kisah Elia dan Elisa juga bermaksud menggambarkan kedua tokoh sebagai nabi, penyambung lidah Allah yang sah kepada umat-Nya Israel. Sama seperti Musa, mereka mempunyai kedekatan khusus dengan TUHAN, Allah Israel.

Kata-kata kunci: *man of God, prophet, prophecy, prototype, miracle, tradition, saga, figure.*

Introduction

The epithet ‘Man of God’ (Hebrew: אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים) is one of the most problematic terms in the Bible.¹ The people who are indicated by the epithet are closely connected with God, but their offices and duties are different. Sometimes the Bible reports nothing about such an אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים other than this name (Jer 35:4). Also, every attempt to determine with certainty the geographical home of this idea is doomed to failure.² Some commentators, then, have maintained it not as a prophetic title but as a “general honorific quality”, without asking what honorific quality the title is meant to describe?³ However, many other commentators remain convinced that the epithet אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים is one of many names used in the Bible to indicate prophets;⁴ it is one of the fundamental terms of the ancient prophecy of Israel.⁵ This epithet is applied prophets “in the sense that they are endowed with divine power, they have been initiated into the divine realm.”⁶ It demonstrates a particular function and relationship of prophets with God who called or sent them. The prophet is a “Man of God” in the sense that he incorporates Divinity, a kind of Godly emanation, by whose power he acts.

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¹D.L. PETERSEN, *The Roles of Israel's Prophets*, Sheffield 1981, 40.

²N.P. BRATSIOTIS, “אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים”, in G.J. BOTTERWECK-H & RINGGREN, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* 1, Michigan 1974, 222-235.

³PETERSEN, *The Roles...*, 40.

⁴W. VOGELS, *I Profeti. Saggio di Teologia Biblica*, Padova 1994, 26.

⁵J. KÜHLEWEIN, “אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים”, in *DTAT* 1, 119.

⁶W. EICHRODT, *Theology of the Old Testament*, London 1987, 296.

The Epithet in the Bible

The epithet "Man of God" occurs in all about 75 times in the Old Testament.⁷ It is distributed in the Old Testament books as follows: Deut (33:1). Josh (14:6). Judg (13:6.8), 1Sam (5 times), 1Kings (19 times), 2Kings (37 times), Jer (35:4), Ps (90:1), Ezra (3:2), Neh (12:24.36), 1Chr (23:14), 2Chr (5 times), thus predominantly in the Deuteronomistic literature. The people whose names are given as "Man of God" are: Elisha (29 times), Elijah (7 times), Moses (6 times), Samuel (4 times), David (3 times), Shemaiah (2 times), Igdaliah (1 time) and anonymous people (24 times).⁸ So predominantly the epithet is used in the sagas of Elijah and Elisha, particularly in Elisha's.

The Epithet in Elijah and Elisha's Stories

In the sagas of Elijah and Elisha there has been preserved reliable historical evidence on the nature of the epithet: one so called is able to bring down fire or rain from heaven, to cure leprosy, or to afflict with this disease or with blindness. Because of his superhuman qualities he is able to cure by prayer and to strike down his enemies and opponents. The epithet expresses the people's admiration for the man who knows secret things and performs wonders. Originally the epithet is an honorific title conferred on holy men which in post-exilic literature acquires new and different connotations, namely the ability to help ordinary people in their daily lives: to provide food for a day, save a family from the shame of slavery, spare one the harassment of insolent youths, etc.⁹

According to Raphael Hallevy,¹⁰ although the epithet "אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" is never used in changing the name of the Godhead, as is "אֱלֹהִים אִישׁ", it does not mean that the epithet must be linked with a demon or a ghost or a spirit, as was accepted by many biblical scholars. Furthermore there are two reasons for this view according to Hallevy. Firstly, the genitive construction in Hebrew, in addition to its regular possessive meaning, has also an adjective one. Thus, the epithet should be interpreted not as it is colloquially translated "Man of God", namely someone dedicated, devoted to the Godhead, but as a "Divine Man", someone endowed with superhuman, divine, qualities and powers; possessing something of the nature of the divinity. Secondly, "אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" in the epithet is not the name of any specific deity but should be viewed collectively as any indeterminate sum of indistinguishable being.¹¹ Consequently "אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" is not incompatible with "אֱלֹהִים" himself.

⁷BRATSIOTIS, *TDOT*, 233. In his following details, however, the total is 76, which total is counted by J. Kuhlewein, *DTAT*, 119.

⁸KUHLEWEIN, *DTAT*, 119.

⁹A. ROFE, *The Prophetic Stories. The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Their Literary Types and History*, Jerusalem 1988, 14.

¹⁰R. HALLEVY, "Man of God", *JNES* 17 (1958), 237-244.

¹¹HALLEVY, "Man of...", 237.

Foretelling the Future

In the biblical tales, there are several aspects of “□□□□□□□□□□” which enable us to check the nature of this concept. A first aspect of the personality of the “□□□□□□□□□□” is to divine the future, to foretell an impending turning point. This task is found, for example, in the tales of the birth of Samson in Judges 13. The testimony is related to the coming of an “□□□□□□□□□□” to Manoah and his barren wife in order to inform them the birth of Samson: “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of angel.” The “□□□□□□□□□□” calls on the barren woman and announces that she will conceive a son. As a diviner of the future and as one whose predictions come true the “□□□□□□□□□□” is the prototype of the prophet who is also a diviner of the future; and in the course of time these two concepts merged and completely blended into each other.

Bringing down Fire from Heaven

A second aspect is the ability to bring down fire from heaven. This second aspect is particularly stressed in the sagas of Elijah. In the story of Elijah and Baal’s prophets on Mount Carmel: “Elijah said to the people, “... the God who answers by fire is indeed God” (1Kings 18:24). Through this bringing down of fire from heaven, Elijah proves to the Baal prophets and to all of Israel people his own and his God’s greatness. Then the fire of the Lord (Yahweh) fell and consumed the burn offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said: ‘The Lord (Yahweh) indeed is God; The Lord indeed is God’” (1Kings 18:38-39).

Fire descends from on high to resolve the deadlock in Israel’s dilemma of faith. Its echoes will reverberate for generations; all those present tremble in awe of the revealed Holiness.¹²

The same thing we read also in the tales about Ahaziah in 2Kings 1. In the passage we can find the confirmation of the epithet for Elijah by the fact that he brings fire from heaven.¹³ Meanwhile Elijah’s identity, and hence his authority, is kept unrevealed: the messengers of Ahaziah know him (Elijah) only as “a man” (v 6); through their description the king himself is able to say who he is: Elijah the Tishbite (v 8). The king, then, tries to intimidate him by showing force: send a captain of fifty, with his fifty men, who calls Elijah “Man of God” (v 9). “Elijah answered the captain of fifty, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty” (vv 10 and 12). Elijah, thus, proves verily to be a “Man of God”. It is worth noticing, however that, unlike Mount Carmel’s tale above, fire descends from the skies with no delay, and not once but twice. In the first tale, there is moment of tension which preceded the miracles: Elijah beseeches God. On the contrary, here, Elijah speaks and fire appears at his

¹²ROFE, *The Prophetic*..., 38.

¹³S.J. DEVRIES, *Prophet Against Prophet. The Role of Michaiah Narrative (1Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition*, Michigan 1978, 62.

command; no prayer is required to accomplish the deed. In the end he goes to Ahaziah of his own volition. The fire serves only to glorify and exalt Elijah.¹⁴ He must be addressed as one would address God; he is certainly no less dangerous than He. Ben Sirach in later generation, who attempts to summarize the deeds of the Tishbite in a few verses, stresses his awe of him: "How glorious you were, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Whose glory is equal to yours? ... Happy are those who saw you and were adorned with your love!" (Sir 48:4.11).

Healing the Sick

A third aspect is the ability to heal the sick. This ability to heal the sick is particularly emphasized in the sagas of Elisha. Elisha became known as a medicine man¹⁵ whose fame spread even as far as Syria from where Benhadad sent a messenger to consult him on whether he would live or die (2Kings 8:7-10). This power of his is also praised by the captive Israelite maid to her mistress in the tale of the healing of Naaman: "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (2Kings 5:3). Elisha also heals with salt the harmful waters of Jericho (2Kings 2:19-22) where he is pictured as a leader who helps people solve their individual as well as collective problems.¹⁶ He renders the poison in the pot of the company of prophets harmless (2Kings 4:38-41), a passage which shows that he not only feeds his followers, but also enables them to overcome the daily hazards of trying to eat during a famine. Hearers of the tale would be encouraged to believe that through Elisha's mediation as a prophet of Yahweh, people can become empowered in the midst of overwhelming circumstances like famine.

Seeing into the Distance

In the sagas of Elisha, we find yet another trait of the personality of "□□□□□□□□□□", the power to see into the distance.¹⁷ Elisha sees from the distance Gehazi taking a present from Naaman who has been already healed and is on his way to his country: "Did I not go with you in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet you?" (2Kings 5:26). From Dothan he sees and hears everything that is happening at the counsel of the Aram officers (2Kings 6:8-23) and also sees the messenger of the King of Israel who came to arrest him while he is still at a great distance from his house: "Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, 'Are you aware that this murderer has sent someone to take off my head?'" (2Kings 6:32).

Reviving Dead Person

Another characteristic of "□□□□□□□□□□" which occurs in the sagas of Elijah and Elisha is the power to revive a dead person. It is told in 1Kings 17:17-24 that

¹⁴ROFE, *The Prophetical...*, 38.

¹⁵HALLEVY, "Man of...", 240.

¹⁶T.H. RENTERIA, "The Elijah/Elisha Stories. A Socio-cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century B.C.E. Israel," in R.B. COOTE, ed., *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*, Atlanta 1992, 112.

¹⁷HALLEVY, "Man of...", 240.

the son of the woman, in whose house Elijah has become a regular guest, “became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him” (v 17). His mother, who has been sheltering Elijah, turns on the prophet angrily, asking him accusingly: “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!” (v 18). This dramatic demand and accusation force Elijah to act. The story continues to resolve itself, as Elijah walks down the stairs and presents the revived son to his mother. The successful resolution of this story declares to those hearing or reading it that this Elijah is indeed “□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□” as the woman confesses: “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (v 24).

The story about reviving a dead person is also found in Elisha cycle. It is told in 2Kings 4:8-37 that Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite, in whose house Elisha has become a regular guest (Cfr. Elijah’s story above!). At the outset, in the words of the woman to her husband, the focus of attention falls upon Elisha as a man of God.¹⁸ We are told that she is the wife of an old man (v 14); belongs to a powerful clan (v 13); is quite wealthy, having fields, servants (v 18), and cattle (v 22), and has enough substance to build a “small roof chamber” and furnish it adequately (v 10), so she is really “a wealthy woman” (Hebrew: □□□□□□□□□□), but –more relevant– she had no child nor did she any more hope to have any (vv 16 and 28). For the promise of the man of God, however, the scene shifts to some years later. She is no more the humble, barren woman: she is a mother.¹⁹ Unfortunately, her fears of illusion and disappointment: “do not deceive your servant” (v 16) are fully confirmed: “the child sat on her lap until noon, and he died” (v 20). The woman, however, shows no signs of grief; her actions, in fact, are characterized by a degree of cold and efficient control. She comes right into the presence of the man of God on the mountain (vv 25 and 27). Her questions pick up two points: it was not her request for a son and she had warned the man of God not to deceive her. Elisha himself has to take personal control of the situation because Gehazi’s attempts to revive the boy fail and the woman herself does not want to leave Elisha as he himself does not want to leave his master, Elijah: ^v.p.n:-yxew> hw"hy>-yx; “as the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” Now the tension begins to be resolved although the solution does not come easily: only on the second attempt the boy wakes. When the boy wakes, the action shifts once again to the woman: “She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left” (v 37). Elisha is respected as a man of God.

The results from all that has been said so far concerning the miraculous legends about Elijah and Elisha put the personality of “□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□” in its proper light. One should see in these legends a further folkloristic development of two character traits of the “□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□”: (1) Because of the charismatic properties with which he is endowed, he is able to call on supernatural forces, and (2) he is mediator between God and men. There is not the slightest doubt that these lines of

¹⁸T.R. HOBBS, *2Kings. World Biblical Commentary* 13, Texas 1985, 46.

¹⁹A. ROFE, “The Classification of the Prophetical Stories,” *JBL* 89 (1970), 433.

Elijah's and Elisha's personalities are historically authentic and belong to the genuine figure of the "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים".²⁰ The epithet is meant to make them stand out as prophets as well as to stress their particularly near relationship with the God of Israel.

Moses as the Prototype of Prophets

In Deut 33:1 Moses is called "אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים": "This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death." It is beyond question here that the "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" is a synonym for prophet.²¹ Deut and Deuteronomistic history are concerned to present prophecy according to their own understanding of the history of Israel and its institutions. This led them to stress the "Mosaic" character of prophecy, in the sense that prophecy was intended to make available throughout history a mediation comparable to that of Moses. At that point Moses emerged as the prophet, i.e. the prototype of prophets.²² So the epithet "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" in which a particular characteristic of prophets and their near relationship with God is expressed, anachronically is used for Moses. In fact, in the post-exilic period Moses, too, is often called "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" (Josh 14:6; Ps 90:1; Ezra 3:2; 1Chr 23:14; 2Chr 30:16; none of these passages, including Deut 33:1, belongs to the pre-exilic period).²³ In the Bible tales about Moses there has been preserved reliable historical evidence on the nature of this "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים": he is able to call on supernatural forces in performing miracles and he is mediator between Yahweh and his people Israel.

Elijah in Modern Culture

As we have already said above, Elijah and Elisha are the most well-known figures as "אֱלִיָּהוּ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים" in the Bible. And Elijah is one of the most popular figures in the Old Testament. He is mentioned not only in the Old and New Testament but also in the Koran, the Holy Book of Islam. Thus, he is well-known in Judaism, in Christianity and in Islam. The name "WhY"liae" in any case indicates that he has been chosen: "My God is YHV (YHW)."²⁴ YHV are the first three letters of the tetragram, the name once used by God to reveal himself to Moses out of the burning bush (Ex 3:14).

In Islamic Tradition

In the Koran, Elijah is mentioned along with several personages of the Old and New Testament. At first he is mentioned briefly together with Zechariah, John and Jesus, while Elisha is mentioned with Ismael, Jonah and Lot: "And Zakariya and Jahya,

²⁰HALLEVY, "Man of...", 240.

²¹J. BLENKINSOPP, "Deuteronomy," in R.E. BROWN, et. al. eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Student Edition, London 1993, 94-109.

²²J. BLENKINSOPP, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Philadelphia 1983, 63.

²³HALLEVY, "Man of...", 243.

²⁴A. WEINER, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism. A Depth-Psychological Study*, London-Henley-Boston 1978, 7.

and Jesus and Elias, all are from the righteous and Ismael and Elisha, Jonah and Lot, and all We chose above the Worlds and of their fathers and of their offspring, and of their brethren, and We chose them and We guided them to the Straight Path ” (Sura 6:85-87).²⁵ And then, in a later sura, a more detailed account of him is recorded. The sura describes how *Allah* (God) dispatched him to preach to his contemporaries that he alone was the true God and not Baal:

Peace be upon Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward those who do right; they are both Our believing servants. And Elias was also one of the Messengers; when he said to his people: ‘Will you fear God? Do you invoke Baal and forsake the Best of Creators?’ But they disbelieved him, so they shall be summoned; except for the sincere servants of God; and We left praise for him among generations in later times” (Sura 37:120-129).

The traditional commentators on the Koran relate these verses to several versions of the biblical Elijah stories, which concluded with his ascension and his transfiguration.²⁶ And inspired by the biblical accounts of the ascension of Enoch and Elijah, “the night journey” of Muhammad in Sura 17:1 is considered as the ascension of Muhammad.²⁷ The sura says:

Glory be to GOD the One, Who did take His servant (Mohamed) on a Night Journey from the Sacred Mosque to Al-Aqsa Mosque, the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our Sign. Indeed! GOD is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.

Muslim theologians who hold that the night journey of Mohammed is to be understood literally, have put forward the theory that the prophet was carried to heaven by a composite animal called *buraq*, literally: the bright one, which must have been suggested by the Judaeo-Christian traditions regarding the Cherubim.

Later, in Islamic traditions Elijah is identified with al-Khadir (‘the Verdant One’), the figure which is not limited in time and place. Just as he was alive at the time of Moses, he was also alive at the time of Mohammed. He appeared to Mohammed on one of his campaigns, as a tall old man with a shining face and wearing glowing white robes. Sharing a meal at a table giving off a green light, bearing an abundance of vegetables, the two prophets had talked to each other. Finally, Elijah had returned to heaven on the wings of angels or on a cloud. The caliphs Omar and Ali had also met al-Khadir, and been taught particularly efficacious prayers by him.²⁸

In Modern Judaism Tradition

As we have already seen in the previous pages, and need not repeat here, in the Hebrew Bible Elijah is presented as one of the principal protagonists. A further very significant mentioned of Elijah in the Bible occurs in the closing passages of Malachi

²⁵The translation of Koran’s texts is cited according to A. ZIDAN and D. ZIDAN, *Translation of The Glorious QUR’AN*, London 1991.

²⁶WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 152.

²⁷K. LUKE, “Elijah’s Ascension to Heaven,” *Bible Bhashyam* 10 (1984), 208.

²⁸WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 155.

(BHS, 3:23-24; NRSV, 4:5-6), the last of Jewish prophets, who lived at the beginning of the fifth century, about four hundred years after Elijah.²⁹ This is the basis of the Jewish people's belief in the reappearance of Elijah on which the Christian tradition about Elijah is based. In contemporary Judaism, however, where the emancipation of the Jews in Western Europe, their assimilation to the culture of their host-people which this brought about, the 'Enlightenment' among the Jewish population of the Eastern European states, the mass emigration to America in the nineteenth century, the systematic Jewish settlement of Palestine after World War I, the Holocaust and finally the establishment of the State of Israel, have affected a radical changes not only in the political aspect but also in the religious and cultural attitude, the figure of Elijah is also changed. Some modern, not traditionally religious, Hebrew poets and novelists have written on the Elijah figure. They explain the blatant difference between the zealous-avenging biblical Elijah and the benevolent and helpful Aggadic one by saying that the Jewish people could not bear the negative picture of the biblical Elijah and therefore created a new, positive Elijah figure.³⁰

In Christian Tradition

The figure of Elijah in the Christian traditions, as it has been already said above, is determined by the eschatological interpretation on the prophecy. One form of Jewish expectations of an eschatological prophet is the returning of Elijah to "turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents" (Malachi BHS: 3:25; NRSV: 4:6). The returning Elijah became the subject of considerable speculation and eschatological doctrine in both early Christian groups and rabbinic circles.³¹

It is John the Baptist who represents the Elijah figure in the gospels. It is said at the birth of John the Baptist. He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15-17).

And after the birth of the child, Zechariah in thanksgiving prophesies: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (Luke 1:76).

Jesus himself proclaimed explicitly to a crowd of people that John the Baptist is Elijah that is to come. Jesus said. Truly I tell you, among those who born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law

²⁹WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 32.

³⁰WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 167.

³¹R.A. HORSLEY, "Like One of the Prophets of Old'. Two Types of Popular Prophets at the time of Jesus," *CBQ* 47 (1985), 439.

prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come (Mt 11:11-14).

And in other time, after Jesus' transfiguration: "The disciples asked him, 'Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist" (Mt 17:10-13).

Thus, in the records of the gospels the essential tasks expected of Elijah by traditional Judaism are performed by John the Baptist.³²

The early Christian Fathers (first to fifth centuries) regarded Elijah as the greatest and most important of all the prophets: the model of a life of simplicity and moderation close to God which Christian ought to imitate. They regarded Elijah as '*noster princeps*'. For them he was the representative and mediator of the divine spirit, the conqueror of ungodliness and of death. Elijah's ascent, according to general opinion, is the reward for his merits.³³ Elijah's relation to John the Baptist is exhaustively considered. On this point, the dominant patristic opinion is that John the Baptist was Jesus' herald at his first appearance on earth, but that before his final return, on the Day of Judgment, Elijah himself will appear. He will proclaim the return of Jesus, perform miracles and bring about mankind's repentance.

The later Christian tradition continually maintained Elijah in a special place, both in liturgy and theology. Numerous churches were dedicated to him and bore his name. The theologians pointed to him and to his disciples as models for the monastic orders. They venerated him above all as a fighter against ungodliness and therefore regarded him also as a patron of the Inquisition. Whereas in popular belief, Elijah remain the miracle-worker and helper, guardian against pestilence and deliverer from serious illnesses. In the Near East he was also regarded as the master of rain, storm and thunder, and thus drove out the remnants of the pagan cult of Helios. On the Day of Elijah bonfires were kindled in his honour on the hilltops, and popular celebrations were held.³⁴

Elisha as the Successor of Elijah

It is obvious that the figure of Elijah has been developed larger than what the Bible mentioned of him. It is not true for Elisha. Whoever wants to have an image of his figure must open the Bible and read the story about him, particularly in the Second Book of Kings. It is true that, in the Bible itself, the stories about Elisha are longer than those about Elijah. They open with the ascension of Elijah in 2Kings 2:1-18 and the passing of his charisma over to Elisha, although his vocation itself has been mentioned in the passage before (1Kings 19:19-21). And they close with the miracles wrought by

³²WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 143.

³³WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 145.

³⁴WEINER, *The Prophet...*, 147.

the prophet's dead body in its grave (2Kings 13:20-21). Unlike Elijah, his master, we are told about Elisha's origin: "Son of Saphat of Abelmeholah" (1Kings 19:16.19) and even about the background of his life: "who was plowing" (1Kings 19:19).

Elisha had a long ministry during the reigns of Jehoram (2Kings 3), Jehu (2Kings 9), Jehoahaz (2Kings 13) and Jehoash (2Kings 13), kings of Israel. After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against his son Jehoram. When Jehoram secured the king of Edom and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, as allies, Jehoshaphat insisted on consulting Elisha. Out of regard to Jehoshaphat and not to Jehoram, Elisha predicted victory over the Moabites (2Kings 3). He saved a poor widow from financial distress by miraculous multiplication of her oil supply (2Kings 4:1-7). He offered favour to a Shunammite by reviving her son. At Gilgal during a famine, he saved from death a company of prophets who had eaten poisoned vegetables (2Kings 4:38-41). When a gift of food was given him, he multiplied it and fed one hundred men (2Kings 4:42-44). He healed Naaman of leprosy (2Kings 5) and recovered a young prophet's borrowed axe (2Kings 6:1-7). He gave timely warning, repeatedly saving Israel from defeat by the Arameans (2Kings 6:8-23). When Benhadad of Aram finally besieged Samaria and the city was reduced to terrible straits, the king of Israel blamed Elisha. Elisha predicted relief the next day (2Kings 6:24-7:20). Again he saved the family of the Shunammite by advising them to escape a coming famine (2Kings 8:1-6). He visited Damascus (2Kings 8:7-15) and sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu king of Israel (2Kings 9:1-3). It is clear that his ministry was filled with miracles, even after his death a body revived just being touched his bones (2Kings 13:20-21). Many of his miracles relieved private needs; some were related to affairs of state.³⁵ Elisha is shown as a miracle-worker, more than his master, Elijah.

Conclusion

Having described the two men of God, Elijah and Elisha, we have now two protagonists who differ from one another both in the biblical tales themselves and in the later traditions. The differences mentioned by the Bible itself, for example, include the following: the origin of Elisha is given, while Elijah appears from nowhere; as a parallel, the life of Elijah is ended by his ascension (so he has no grave) while Elisha is buried; the calling of Elisha is mentioned, while that of Elijah is not; etc. Moreover, as we have just seen above, in the later traditions after the biblical tales, these two prophets have been rendered in very different ways: the tradition about Elijah is continually developed until he becomes an eschatological figure, while Elisha remain tied to the biblical stories mentioned briefly above. In light of such difference, one cannot help asking why modern authors, both exegetes and theologians, always mention the two of them together? In fact, no body speaks of one without referring to the other; Elijah and Elisha are always mentioned as a perfect pair like fish and chips are always served together by a good cook. Why?

³⁵E. RUSSELL-J.A. MOTYER, "Elisha," in *NIDB*, 308.

When the modern authors always mentioned them as a pair, as they do also about Moses and Joshua, it is not because they are shown to be identical figures in the Bible but because Elisha has received “a double share of Elijah’s spirit” (2Kings 2:9), and so he has become Elijah’s successor as “□□□□□□□□□□”. It is clear that the personal spirit of Elijah appear as the source which imparts authority to Elisha.³⁶ This reception of the double share identified Elisha as the “first-born” among the prophets, that is, as the one entitled to become the new leader of the prophetic guilds in the place of Elijah. Its intention is to ground Elisha’s authority as a leader of the company of the prophets in Elijah, by adopting and modifying various motifs from the stories on Elijah. Elisha’s reception of authority is validated in three places: first, by the test of “seeing” mentioned in 2Kings 2:10.12: “If you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you... Elisha kept watching and crying out, ‘Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’” His last request to his master is now fulfilled when he “kept watching” the episode of Elijah’s ascension into heaven. Second, by Yahweh parting the waters of the Jordan at Elisha’s request in 2Kings 2:14: “When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.” When he returns across the Jordan, Elisha uses the same techniques as Elijah who strikes the river whose waters roll back so that he can cross over. For Elisha this miracle is the legitimization of his position as successor to Elijah “by deeds of power similar to those of his master.” Striking the waters authenticates Elisha as bearer of God’s power. Third, by the affirmation of the company of the prophets in v15 of the same passage: “When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’ They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.” The testing of the authority of Elisha, however, appears clearly in the dialogues between Elisha and the company of the prophets who are at Jericho. The company of the prophets have gathered together fifty strong men who wish to look for Elijah. In the light of Elisha’s original advice (2Kings 2:16.18), the fruitless search of the fifty strong men provides a double attestation of Elisha’s prophecy.³⁷ 1Kings 18 Ahab sought “to find” Elijah but could not; Obadiah was afraid the spirit of the Lord might carry Elijah away so that Ahab could not find him; and here, Elisha reiterates to these men that it is useless to seek Elijah. The test is successful, Elisha’s word is reliable, and his inheritance of the spirit of Elijah is confirmed. Obviously this will impart to readers (or in ancient time: to listeners) a theological message: in the same manner as Elijah, Elisha is also □□□□□□□□□□, as his faithful prophet, has a particularly close relationship with the Lord, the God of Israel.

³⁶Z. WEISMAN, “The Personal Spirit as Imparting Authority,” *ZAW* 93 (1981), 224.

³⁷D.R. DAVIS, “The Kingdom of God in Transition. Interpreting 2Kings 2,” *WTJ* 46 (1984), 390.

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