(A) critical study of the Elijah and Elisha narratives

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Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE ELIJAH AND ELISHA NARRATIVES

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1932

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**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

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PREFACE

The Elisha and Elijah narratives compose a significant portion of the Books of the Kings, and the prophets, themselves, hold a much more significant place in the line of Hebrew prophets. Quite a few volumes of literature have been written concerning these narratives, and many more volumes have been written concerning these two great prophetic heroes of Israel. But there have been only a few literary attempts, if any at all in the English language, to present a comprehensive and complete study of the life of Elijah and Elisha as revealed in a modern critical study of the Biblical narratives and other ancient materials.

It is the Purpose of this thesis to present a comprehensive and critical study of the life and activity of these two great prophets as revealed in the light of modern criticism; and at same time point out the great illuminating and ever abiding spiritual values that are so richly imbedded in these early narratives.
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE
ELIJAH AND ELISHA
NARRATIVES
PART 1 THE NARRATIVES

The Elijah and Elisha narratives compose a considerable portion of the vast compilation of materials under the title of the Books of the Kings. These narratives may be more specifically classified under the group of narratives of the Northern Kingdom.

The large group of narratives of the Northern Kingdom compose the following passages of the First and Second Books of the Kings.


This large group consists of narratives that concern the affairs of the Kingdom of Israel. These narratives are distinguished from other narratives in the Books of the Kings by certain definite marks that are characteristic of the writers and language of the Northern Kingdom. The lengthy stories reveal a high descriptive power and a sympathetic feeling towards the Northern Kingdom; this conclusion is substantiated by such inferences as "Beer-Sheba which belongeth to Judah," 1 King 19:3 - "at Beth-Shemesh which belongeth to Judah," 11 King 14:11. Another distinction may also be noticed in that no where in these narratives is there any blame attached to the calf-worship of Bethel and Dan. The efforts of Elijah and Elisha are wholly directed to the rooting out of the foreign cult of the Tyrian Baal.¹ These evidences, and the presence of several linguistic peculiarities that are characteristic of the North Palestinian dialect, confirm almost wholly the theory

¹ Burney, C. F. "Notes on the Book of Kings" - P.207
that these narratives are of the Northern Kingdom.

These narratives are by no means the work of any one author. They may be divided into two distinct groups: (1) some are histories of Elijah and Elisha, the movements which they initiated in the direction of religious reform; (2) The other group is chiefly concerned with the fate of the kingdom from a political standpoint which was determined mainly by the action of the king, though the prophets play an important role as the advisors and announcers of the oracle of Jahweh. Both groups have religious motives and may be equally regarded as the work of men of prophetic training; perhaps of the prophetic guilds which had developed into prominence in those times.2

CONTENTS OF THE ELIJAH AND ELISHA NARRATIVES

The two classes of northern narratives are closely interrelated and can not be adequately treated entirely separate from the other. These narratives compose the story of the struggle between the prophets of Jehovah and the followers of Baal; one of the main themes is the fall of the house of Omri and the removal of the foreign gods. The story is interrupted with accounts of the Syrian wars, political incidents and personal incidents in the lives of the prophets.

The passages that are specifically classed under the Elijah and Elisha groups are as follows: Elijah narratives - 1 Kings 17-19, 21; 11 Kings 1:2-17a; 2:1-18, - Elisha narratives 11 Kings 2:1-18, 19-22, 23-25; 4:1-7, 8-37, 38-41, 42-44; Chapter 5; 6:1-7; 8:1-6, 7-15; 9-10:28; 13:14-19, 20, 21

Outline of Contents

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C. Elijah with the widow of Zarephath - 17:8-24
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J. The conflict between Elijah and Ahaziah - II Kings 2:1-17
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II. Elisha

A. The calling of Elisha - I Kings 19:19-21
B. Elisha succeeds Elijah - II Kings 2:1-18
C. Miracles of Elisha - II Kings 2:19-25; 4:8-6
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2. Elisha increases the widow’s oil - 4:1-7
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5. Naaman is healed. Gehazi becomes leprous - 5:1-27
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CHAPTER II  STRUCTURE OF THE ELIJAH NARRATIVES

Compilation and Sources

Considerable difficulty is encountered when one attempts to discern the integrity of these loosely compiled and ill-arranged narratives. There are various suggestions by many scholars for the proper rearrangements of these narratives.

It is commonly agreed among most scholars that passages I Kings 17-19 form a continuous narrative. The abruptness with which this great prophet is introduced has given rise to the supposition that part of the original introduction was omitted or abbreviated during the process of compilation. Throughout the history of Elijah his appearances are rare, sudden and brief. Many critics express the opinion that the history of Elijah was drawn from some inadequate narrative of the work of the prophets and was introduced abruptly in its present form as soon as it began to touch upon the reign of Ahab. There are other critics who think such theory is vain; they contend that the dramatic suddenness expressed the nature and character of Elijah; that if a more comprehensive introduction should be added, the dramatic effect of the great prophets advent would be weakened. It must be admitted that the abruptness with which Elijah is introduced in I Kings 17 is in perfect corroboration with his character, but it is more probable that the present form is the extract from an older source.

   (Lumby, J. R. Camb. Bible - P.179)

4. Skinner, New Century Bible - P.223
   (Barnes, W. E., Camb. Bible - 143)

5. Kent, C. F. "Israel's Historical and Biographical Narratives" - P.18
Chapter 21 obviously breaks the connection between Chapters 20 and 22; and it is possible that it originally was placed next to Chapter 19. The Greek version places Chapter 21 next to Chapter 19.

Unity and Integrity

Quite a difference in opinions has been aroused in deciding whether Chapter 21 is the logical and original continuation of Chapters 17-19. Most critics, such as Wellhausen, Kittel, Driver and others, are of the opinion that Chapter 21 is a continuation of 1 Kings 17-19, and is the work of the same author. Chapter 21 follows Chapter 17-19 in the original Greek manuscript. C. F. Burney thinks that "the dislocation may have been due to the desire to bring the prophecy of Ahab's death (11 Kings 21:19) nearer to the account of its occurrence (1 Kings 22:35) and perhaps to a minor degree to the king's mood as in 1 Kings 20:43 or in 21:4."

The most noticeable points of the affinity of Chapter 21 with Chapters 17-19 are summed up as follows: Firstly, Wellhausen, Skinner and others cite as a point of contact between the two narratives, the central position occupied by Elijah. But, on the other hand, this theory can not be justifiably confirmed by certain facts in the narrative. It may be maintained that Elijah is not really the central figure of Chapter 21 as in Chapters 17-19. There are no indications in Chapter 21 that the personality of Elijah was the center of interest. It seems rather that the king and his actions form the center of interest in Chapter 21 both at the beginning and at the end of the narrative. Elijah does not appear upon the scene until verse 17, and then, as

Burney suggests, takes scarcely a more conspicuous position than Micaiah 22:8.

A second point in the argument for the affinity of Chapter 21 with Chapters 17-19 is the comparison of the sudden dramatic approaches of Elijah upon the king, Ahab (compare 1 Kings 17:1 and 21:20); Wellhausen expresses this point of view as Elijah making an eagle-like swoop upon Ahab at the right psychological moment. 8

A third point in favor of the affinity of the two narratives is suggested by Skinner - the conception of the character of Ahab as a weak man dominated by the strong-willed and unscrupulous Jezebel is suggested in both narratives. But there is little weight to this evidence because it was probably commonly known that Jezebel dominated Ahab and that her influence and power was almost unlimited. Therefore, it would not be out of ordinary if any two or more writers should give an account of Ahab with this fact in view.

Another more convincing argument may be based upon the irascible verse 20 in Chapter 21 - "and Ahab said to Elijah, 'Hast thou found me, oh mine enemy?'" This statement presupposes some previous encounter between the prophet and the king, such as that in 1 Kings 18:17 - "and it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said unto him, 'Art thou he that troubleth Israel?'" These two passages form a connecting link in expressing the attitude of Ahab towards Elijah.

There is a noticeable similarity in the style, structure and the
dramatic manner in which Ahab expresses his dislikes of Elijah when
he is suddenly confronted by the prophet.

These various arguments may not be thoroughly convincing, but they
undoubtedly show that Chapter 21 is much more closely akin to Chapters
17-19 than to Chapters 20 and 22.

On the other hand, there are certain arguments that must be con-
sidered that indicate that there is no unity between Chapters 17-19
and Chapter 21.

Kuonen has observed that there is no reference in either of the
narratives to any of the events that occurred in the other; the murder
of Naboth forming the single crime of Ahab and Jezebel is the main
theme in Chapter 21, while in Chapters 17-19 the main theme is centered
around the struggle between Jahweh, and Baal.\textsuperscript{9} Ewald adds to this
thought that the murder of Naboth was probably more effective in
arousing the spirit of the revolution, in which the house of Omri
perished, than was the corrupt religious policy of Ahab.\textsuperscript{10} Skinner further
adds that the contest upon Mount Carmel becomes much more intelligible
by the supposition that the heart of the people had been already stirred
by the knowledge of the murder of Naboth. He states that such would
be impossible if Chapter 21 was sequel to Chapter 19.\textsuperscript{11} But these are

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{9} Burney, C. F. Op. Cit. - 210}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} Skinner - Camb. Bible, 255}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Ibid - 255}
merely conjectures that have little significance. The murder of Naboth probably further inflamed a revolutionary spirit that already had been started, but since such crimes and practices were common where the monarch held absolute power, it is quite doubtful that this act alone could hardly have been sufficient enough within itself to play such an important role in instigating such a revolution which soon followed. The causes of the revolution lie much deeper and are far more intricate than this event; most likely they had been brewing even before Ahab came to the throne. Thus, the whole argument and added suggestions may be regarded as a point of little significance.

Skinner presents an argument stating that the career of Elijah finds its natural termination in the appointment of his successor, Elisha; and it is not quite probable that the same author should after that introduce him again on the stage of public affairs. 12

A summary of the arguments of both views fails to be convincing either way, and no definite conclusion can be reached as to the relative authorship of the two sections.

A matter of greater interest and importance would be a discussion of the connection of Chapter 21 with its natural sequel IT Kings 19: 1-10:28. Most critics (Wellhausen, Driver, Kittel and others) generally argue that the latter narrative is by a different author, probably the same author of IT Kings 20, 22; IT Kings 3:4-27. 12a

12a Burney, C. F. - Op. Cit. 211
There are certain discrepancies that confirm this theory. In the latter narrative (II Kings 9-10) the "field" of Naboth is near Jezreel, but in the former narrative it is near the palace of Ahab and is described as a "vineyard".

Other arguments that support the theory that these two narratives were not written by the same author are based upon the facts that the style, form and language expression vary decidedly between the two narratives. The narrative in II Kings 9-10 is much more accurate and contains many details that are entirely lacking in Chapter 21. It may be observed that the narrative in I Kings 21:13 records only the death of Naboth while the narrative in II Kings 9:26 speaks also of the blood of his sons as calling for vengeance. 13

But, on the other hand, there are considerations that clearly indicate that the two narratives form a unity. Burney suggests that the meeting of Joram with Jehu upon the estate of Naboth, as recorded in II Kings 9:21b "is a touch of high dramatic power which demands that the writer should not only have known the story of Naboth (proved in II Kings 9:25-26) but should actually have written it down himself as an introduction to the sequel II 9.ff." 14 There is no doubt that the author of the latter narrative was well acquainted with the story of Naboth, but there is little or no reason to assume that he should be the author of the story as recorded in Chapter 21.

Attempts have been made by various scholars to form a unity of the narrative in II Kings 9-10:28 with I Kings 20, 22; II Kings 3:4-27; 6:8-7:20. If this rearrangement should be granted, the diverse authorship of I Kings 21 and II Kings 9-10 would necessarily follow, since the narrative of I Kings 21 cannot be regarded as a part or continuation of Chapters 20, 22.

Wellhausen has cited several coincidences in phraseology of II Kings 9-10 with the narrative of I Kings 20, 22. The phrase "into an inner chamber" is used in II Kings 9:2; I Kings 20:30; 22:25; the word "tarry" is used in II Kings 9:3 and also in 7:9; "take them alive" in II Kings 10:14 and 7:12; II Kings 20:18. There is not much importance laid upon the significance of these collections of phrases because there is no striking phrase that could not be commonly used by any contemporary writer of that age.

On the other hand, there is a point of phraseology that would absolutely discredit the theory of a common authorship of the two narratives. This significant phrase is the title that is used when referring to the King of Israel, Ahab.

The phrase "King of Israel" is commonly used throughout the narratives in I Kings 20, 22; II Kings 3:4-27; 6:8-7:20; this use of address generally occurs in every case reserved for the specification at the commencement of a section.

In I Kings 20, the phrase "King of Israel" is used eleven times;

"Ahab the King of Israel" is used twice; "the King" is used four times. In 1 Kings 22, the phrase "King of Israel" is used seventeen times; "the King", four times. In 2 Kings 3:4-27, "King of Israel" is used eight times; simply "Ahab", once. In 2 Kings 6:8-7:20, "King of Israel" is used seven times and "The King", ten times.

But the narratives as found in 2 Kings 9 and 1 Kings 21 exhibit a regular preference for the proper name simply without the title. In 2 Kings 9, the name of the King - "Joram" or "Jehoram" - is used nine times in reference to the King; only once is he referred to as "Jehoram the King of Israel". (This title was used to distinguish him from Ahaziah, the King of Judah,) Just simply the term "King of Israel" is never used in this narrative.

A similar difference in the usage of the title is observed in 1 Kings 21; the King is simply referred to as "Ahab" nine times, "Ahab King of Samaria" (verse 1), and "Ahab King of Israel" (verse 16). 16

The diversity in form of reference to the King may be quite convincing in many respects, probably more so than the argument cited by Wellhausen in preceding paragraphs; but it is not conclusive and is not without slight discrepancies.

This diversity in the usage of address in referring to the King does not prove the identity of authorship for the two narratives 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 9. Different writers could easily have employed the same obvious citations of the proper name. But, on the other hand, the fact of the disagreement in form of reference between 2 Kings 21 and 1 Kings 20,22

should be emphasized as a demonstration of the diversity of authorship. In the narratives of I Kings 22 and II Kings 3:4:27 the names of Ahab and Joram are never mentioned (only in 3:6) in spite of the close connection with "Jehosaphat the King of Judah"; but in II Kings 9, the usual form of citation is "Jehoram" or "Joram", even where there is connection with "Ahaziah, the King of Judah". These arguments almost prove the diversity in authorship of the narratives of I Kings 20, 22 and II Kings 9. This dissociation does not prove but it adds much weight to the arguments that have been presented in preceding paragraphs that favored the unity of the narratives of I Kings 17-19 and I Kings 21.

II Kings 1:2-17a is a narrative from an entirely different source than the other narratives that have been mentioned. The source from which the narrative was taken belongs to another cycle of prophetic and miraculous groups of narratives which are so prevalent in this part of the history of the Kings. Some recent critics, states Skinner, regard verses 2-8 as the original kernel of the passage and that the author of I Kings 17-19, 21 is the same author of these verses. The remaining verses of 9-16 are thought to have been a legendary supplement of a much later date. Burney seems to think that the entire story was written at a later date and written by a different author from that of I Kings 17-19, and 21.

Burney's view is substantiated with certain evidences that can not be slightly dealt with. An unusual abbreviated form for the name of Elijah used here in verses 2-8 is used in no other place in the

17. Skinner - New Century Bible, 273
Old Testament except in Malachi 4:5; again the literary merit is much inferior to the preceding passages. Thus, it is quite apparent that the entire passage, II Kings 1:2-17a, is a narrative from a distinct and separate source than that of the other narratives and was written at a much later date.

The next section of narrative study presents problems as difficult as the preceding narratives; this is the narrative that tells of the translation of Elijah. One of the problems of this narrative that confronts critics is the question whether this narrative forms the conclusion of the Elijah narratives, or the introduction of the Elisha narratives, or both.

Burney is of the opinion that the author of this narrative is also probably the author of the narratives in I Kings 17-19; II Kings 2:1-18; 4:1-37 and 5. Therefore, this fragment could be considered as the suitable conclusion for the Elijah narratives and at the same time an introduction for the Elisha narratives. This theory of the unity and common authorship of these narratives is based upon the fact that the author uses throughout these passages a repetition of thought, phrases, incidents and terms often in the same and identical words. This conspicuous similarity may be determined from the following comparison made by C. F. Burney. 18a

ELIJAH

I Kings 17:8-24 - miraculous provision for the widow of Zarephath during the famine

The raising of her son from death

I Kings 18:26 "But there was no voice, neither was there any that answered."

Also verse 29 - "But there was no voice nor any that answered, nor any attention."

I Kings 19:13, 19 mention of Elijah's mantle

I Kings 18:42 "and he crouched upon the earth."

ELISHA

II Kings 4:1-7 - miraculous provision for the wife of one of the sons of the prophets

II Kings 4:8-37 - Resurrection of the son of the Shunammite woman

II Kings 4:31, "but there was no voice, nor any attention

II Kings 2:8, 13, 14 the same

II Kings 4:34, 35, "and he crouched upon him"
Kings 2:2, 4, 6. "As Jahureh liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

Kings 2:7, 15 "over against"

Kings 2:17, "and they urged him till he was ashamed"

Kings 2:17, "my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof"

Kings 4:30, the same

Kings 4:25, the same

Kings 8:11, "and he set (his countenance upon him) till he was ashamed"

Kings 13:14

These coincidences are well worth considering. However, the evidence presented in Kings 8:11 and 13:14 is not sufficient enough to build a constructive argument upon.

On the other hand, Professor Skinner presents suggestive arguments that would discredit the theory that there existed a unity and common authorship of Kings 2:1-18 and Kings 17-19 and the other narratives suggested by Burney. Skinner suggests that Elijah's close personal relations with the prophetic guilds is nowhere alluded to in any of the Elijah narratives, and is not in keeping with the solitariness of Elijah which is reflected from all these records. Ewald suggests that Elijah might have changed his manner of life and began to affiliate himself more freely with the prophetic guilds.

19. Skinner - New Century Bible, 277
A second point that Skinner offers is that in 1 Kings 19, Elisha is already designated as Elijah's successor and has been invested with Elijah's prophetic mantle; but here, on the contrary, the succession is still doubtful and contingent on an event with which Elijah himself is not familiar. But this is not to be regarded as a repetition of the prophetic appointment of Elijah. The account in Chapter 19 concerns the beginning of Elisha becoming a disciple to Elijah to share in the prophetic duties of Elijah and remain his assistant. But here we have Elisha taking on the entire sacred responsibility of becoming the successor to Elijah and where he is to receive a double portion of the power of Elijah.

A third point offered by Skinner, attempting to show that this passage is of a separate source than that of 1 Kings 17-19, is the opinion that the writer of 1 Kings 19:15 could hardly have thought of Elijah as "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Some commentators on this phrase interpret it as meaning that the prophet was a greater strength to the nation than all its chariots and horsemen. 20a

If we are to accept this interpretation of the passage, it is quite obvious that such address to Elijah here would be quite contrasting to the fugitive Elijah described by the writer of 1 Kings 19:15ff.

But this argument can not be considered as significant because it is based upon questionable theories. There is another question to be considered before such an argument could have much weight. The

20a. Skinner - New Century Bible, 280
Barnes - Cambridge Bible, 247
question to be considered is whether the apostrophe in II Kings 2:12 was addressed to Elijah himself or did Elisha refer to the vision. Probably the majority of critics are of the opinion that Elisha referred to Elijah rather than to the vision of the horsemen and chariots, etc. 21. Elisha could have addressed Elijah as "my father" because this title of affection was probably given by a younger prophet to an elder; this is suggested in I Samuel 10:12. 22

C. F. Burney is of the opinion that Elisha referred to both Elijah and the vision. He interprets the expression as meaning "that Elijah, as after him Elisha, stands for Jahweh's invisible forces which should be Israel's true safe-guard and to convey the apprehension lest this safe-guard should be lost to the nation with the removal of the prophet." 23 If this interpretation is accepted, of course the third argument against the theory that this passage is of the same authorship as that of the narrative in I Kings 17-19 would be invalid.

It is rather suspicious that the expression Elisha made is of the very identical words that Joash, the King of Israel, addressed to Elisha himself on his death bed. W. E. Barnes offers a very enlightening suggestion in that probably the original text of this verse had only "my father, my father" as Elisha's passionate exclamation at the departing of Elijah; and that the remaining words were introduced by a

21. See, (Skinner - New Century Bible, 278
(Lumby, J. R. - Cambridge Bible, Vol. II 15
(Barnes, W. E. - Cambridge Bible, 189
22. Lumby - Cambridge Bible, P. 13
23. Burney, C. F. - "Notes on the Book of Kings", 265
very early transcriber from II Kings 13:14. If this suggestion should be accepted, it would solve the mystery of such an expression in two different and separate narratives; it would also eliminate part of the arguments of Skinner showing that the narrative in II Kings 2:1-18 is of a different source than the narrative in I Kings 17-19. After reviewing the critical analysis of the preceding arguments, it seems that there is a conspicuous unity and strong evidences of a common authorship of these narratives.

23a. Barnes, W. E. Cambridge Bible - 188
CHAPTER 111

THE ELISHA NARRATIVES

Character of Narratives

There is a collection of a large group of narratives in 11 Kings 2:1-18:15; 13:4-21 that treat upon the life of Elisha. These stories have all the characteristics of having formerly been orally transmitted from person to person for some period before they were compiled or reduced to a written form.

They are mainly characterized by their outstanding supernatural elements: The supernatural element is so prominent that in some instances the ethical motives are almost obscured. These narratives are chiefly wonder stories that exalt Elisha; he is the great wonder worker and man of God who had a doubled portion of the power of Elijah. The purpose of some of the accounts are not merely to exalt Elisha but to exalt the authority of the prophetic order, and also to inculcate obedience and respect for the prophetic order. 24

These narratives are much inferior in literary quality when compared with the Elijah narratives. They lack unity, they are crude, legendary and rather fantastic. It is impossible to regard them as of historical value. Since they are just a group of anecdotes thrown together, one may expect inconsistencies and contradiction. Peace is said to be between Israel and Damascus in 11 Kings 5:27. Gehazi is an outcast Leper; but in 8:1 he appears before the King without any further ado, and he seems to become quite familiar with the King. Some critics consider these narratives of slight historical value because they are so enwrapped in legendary coloring.

24. Konig, E. - Jewish Ency. Volume 5, Page 137
But as Gunkel points out in his book on the Legends of Genesis, we must recognize that these are fragments of traditions that have a historical background that could stand the test of criticism. One must also recognize their great value for the light they throw on the manners and beliefs which prevailed at the time when they were written.

Sources and Compilation

It has already been suggested that the Elisha narratives were formerly traditions that were orally transmitted from person to person. But the account we have in their present form in the Book of Kings suggest that they were taken from another compilation. Professor Skinner suggests that as there was probably a "Life of Elijah", so there must have been a compilation of stories forming the "Life of Elisha".

Many critics are of the opinion that these narratives once formed a cycle of stories that were current in various versions before they were incorporated into the Book of Kings in their present form. Kent and others have classified these stories into two cycles - the Gilgal cycle and the Samaria cycle. The Gilgal cycle represents those stories that were formed around Elisha while he resided at Gilgal. He probably lived in close association with the guild of the sons of the prophets located there.

27a Konig, E. Jewish Ency. Volume V Page 137
28. Kent, C. F. "History of Israel's Historical Narratives" Page 19
29. 11 Kings 4:38-44
The Gilgal cycle of Elisha Narratives are found in 11 Kings 2,4:1-7, 38-44; 6:1-7 (as listed in Kent). They frequently refer to these sons of the prophets and their wives. Kent suggests that the stories of this cycle are further distinguished by their relating without exception, to the private life of Elisha; and they resemble most of those found in the early Elijah group. It is probable that these narratives were gathered together by the sons of the prophets in that locality and reduced to a form of writing.

Kent classifies the narratives in 11 Kings 3-8;15 and also 14:3-14. In these stories, Elisha dwells at Samaria. The stories reflect the public life of Elisha rather than the private life; he is in close touch with the King and court; he is a prominent figure in the wars with Moab and Aram. There is no mention of the prophetic sons, but instead Gehazi, the servant of Elisha is frequently mentioned. The Samaria cycle of stories embodies more historical data than the Gilgal group. Both of these groups seem to depend upon the early Elijah stories for their material. This is demonstrated by the fact that the same elements and in some cases the identical stories re-appear in enlarged proportions.

Several suppositions concerning the compilation of these narratives may be suggested by the close similarity of the Elijah and Elisha narratives: (1) the Elijah and Elisha narratives could have been confused by the various narrators before they were written; (2) if the Elijah narratives were written first, some of the same events may have been fused into the Elisha stories before they were written; (3) or a later writer or writers could have intentionally built or revised

31. 11 Kings 5:3 6:24,32
32. 11 Kings 4-6,8
some of the written Elisha stories around some of the kernels of the Elijah stories, attempting to show that Elisha was as great or a greater prophet than Elijah.

The arguments and evidences for the classification of these narratives are quite weighty and demand some consideration. On the other hand one must consider that it is quite probable that some of these stories may be independent of either group. Kent suggests that close analogies may also be traced with certain of the patriarchal stories - as for example the prediction that the Shunammite woman should have a son before a year had passed, compared with Genesis 13:14. However, this argument is only suggestive and lacks sufficient grounds for being seriously considered.

33. Kent C.F. History of Israel's Historical Narratives Page 20.
CHAPTER IV  

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Date and Authorship

From the past discussions it is quite obvious that any attempt to formulate an accurate estimation of the date and authorship of these loosely compiled fragments would prove to be quite futile.

A fairly close estimation of the dates of some of the narratives can be drawn by studying their contents and by studying contemporary histories that refer to the same events that are recorded in the narratives. Archaeology also is beginning to shed some light upon these narratives. According to the classification of Archaeological finding by Barton and others that shed light upon the book of Kings, very little has been of any direct value to these narratives. 33a

The very suggestion of any date of any of these various narratives would have to be made upon the basis of the past discussions. Thus one can only estimate the date upon an analysis of the previous arguments and upon what views he accepts as most probable.

Elijah Narratives

It seems to be the concensus of opinion among most scholars that the narratives in 1 Kings 17-19,21, form a continued unity. Granting this to be so, upon close analysis of the contents there are convincing evidences that this narrative is of an early date, probably earlier than any other of the narratives of the Northern Kingdom.

33a. (See Barton, Archaeology and the Bible (Jack J.W. Samaria in the time of Ahab)
Kent speaks of Elijah "as a spokesman of Jehovah, like Moses in the early prophetic or Samuel in the late Ephraimite narratives, he (Elijah) moulds history." The very freshness of the stories, the directness in the language, the detailed description, and other literary qualities suggest that at least the kernels of the stories were closely contemporary with the life of Elijah. No trace of the ethical enthusiasm fostered by Amos and Hosea are found in these narratives; the worship at the public shrines like Bethel and Dan, with their Golden Calves receive no censure. The chief issue at stake is the combating of Baalism in its struggle for supremacy over the Jah-weh religion. Thus we may be quite certain that these stories clearly antedate the time of Amos when he delivered his message at Bethel.

But before a date can be closely estimated one must consider a problem that is much more complex; that is, were the narratives written during the life of Elijah or close to the period of Elijah's life, or a few generations after? The preceding arguments or evidences tend to show that the narratives were written contemporaneously with the time of Elijah. But there is one indication that the narratives were oral traditions that were not committed to writing until at least a generation or so after the death of Elijah. It is quite obvious that character of Elijah and some of the historical events had begun to be clothed with mystery and legendary coloring.

It is, however, quite possible that this legendary coloring was added to the original account of the Life of Elijah when the compiler was placing the narratives in their present form.

If this should be accepted as an explanation of the traditional and legendary coloring, the narratives were probably written by the Prophetic Guild during or soon after the lifetime of Elijah, which would be in the ninth century after about 850 B.C.

On the other hand if the view that the narratives were at first oral traditions for a generation or more the approximate date would be in the earlier part of the eighth century, between 800 and 750 B.C.

**Elisha Narratives**

It is much more complex and difficult to determine an approximate date of the compilation of the Elisha narratives; and it is almost impossible to determine the literary date of each narrative. If we accept the theory that the Elisha narratives can be classified under the two groups suggested in the previous discussion, then the task of determining a date becomes much easier.

It is possible that the compilation of these narratives were similar to the conditions and situations in the compiling of the Elijah narratives. But one can not overlook the fact that the Elisha narratives are quite different from the Elijah narratives; they are so filled with legendary materials that it can hardly be said that they were written in their present form during or shortly after the lifetime of Elisha. These narratives have all the indications of having been legendary stories that were commonly told among the people long before they were written in any form. Thus, it is quite probable that the present compiler of the Book of the Kings received these stories at quite a late date. According to the theory of the narratives being divided into the Gilgal and Samaria Cycles, Kent, express-
es the possibility that the Gilgal cycle was not written until after
the fall of Samaria 722 B.C.; and the Samaria cycle was probably
written a short time before the fall of Samaria, 722 B.C. But
despite the legendary materials and character of these narratives
many scholars assert that they belong to the literature of the Northern
Kingdom and to the eighth century. Kittel, Wellhausen, Pro-
fessor E. A. Leslie and other critics are of the opinion that the
kernel of these narratives were written probably as early as the
ninth century. If this view is accepted, it is quite suggestive
that later compilers added the miraculous and legendary coloring to
the historical kernels of the narratives. This should cause no
alarm for it is still a common practice to add legendary tales to
the life of great men; this is exemplified by legends concerning
Washington and others even during their lifetime.

AUTHORSHIP OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA NARRATIVES:

Traditions have ascribed the authorship of the entire Book of Kings
to each of several men; quite a few have referred to Jeremiah as being
the author of the entire Book, but this is exceedingly improbable and
without any grounds for such support. It is quite probable that the
prophets Elijah and Elisha could have related many of their experiences
to the prophets of the prophetic guilds, and that these prophets wrote the
kernel of the original stories concerning the lives and the prophetic ac-
tivities of Elijah and Elisha. Concerning the authorship of these narra-
tives, we can be assured of only two facts: that there were more than one
author of these narratives and that at the present time we have no avail-
able means of determining who is the author of any of these narratives.

37. Leslie, E. A. - Abingdon Bible, Page 110
38. Lunby, J. R. Camb. Bible - Page 7
CHAPTER V  HISTORICAL EPOCH OF THE NARRATIVES

Historical Survey

The Elijah and Elisha narratives cover historical events of the Northern Kingdom and other incidents that happened within a century about the period between 875-997, that is, between the reigns of Ahab and Joash. This period marked a sharp decline in the history of the Hebrew people. The division of the monarchy increased friction instead of eliminating it; mutual suspicion, civil and foreign wars, and disputes sapped the material sources of both Kingdoms and hampered all intellectual, political, commercial and moral growth that might have occurred under a stronger government. Judah, the southern Kingdom had been able to maintain temporary peace and prosperity during the first half century after the division of the Kingdom. But the situation of the Northern Kingdom became worse than it was under the rule of Solomon. The sword and the dagger ruled; in thirty seven years Israel had six kings, three of whom died of violent means. These kings were merely petty military despots set up by the people in attempting to relieve the national situation by the use of force.

The great Assyria under the leadership of Assurnatsirpal, was arousing from its sleep of a century, and in 876 the Assyria army had reached as far as the Lebanon Mountains. Omri, the king of Israel and all the neighboring kings paid tribute to prevent a catastrophe.

Reign of Ahab

The narratives begin their account during the reign of Ahab. Israel was for the first time beginning to realize peace and prosperity which started under the efficient reign of the powerful Omri, the
father of Ahab. Ahab proved to be equally as powerful as his father Omri; the political and religious situation of his Kingdom was in a critical state, with other added misfortunes such as drouth and famine. Unfortunately we do not have a complete nor chronological order of events in the reign of Ahab. But the most important matter in the reign of Ahab is his wars with Damascus. Israel had been a vassal to Damascus since the reign of Omri, and Ahab began to feel that he could not continue the increased tribute demanded by Ben-hadad of Damascus. Israel was defeated in an attack made by Ben-hadad of Damascus and Samaria was plundered. But, according to the narratives an unnamed prophet advised Ahab to send a picked force of men into the camp of Ben-hadad and attack them while they were drunk celebrating their victory; they succeeded in gaining a great victory. The next year, about 857 B.C. Ben-hadad attacked Israel again; the battle occurred on the plateau near Aphek in the Hauran. Again Ahab defeated his enemy and forced him to unconditional surrender. Ahab was very lenient with his foe and gave him freedom; he was severely criticised by the prophets and by many of the people. But from the records of Shalmaneser, the great Assyrian, it is evidenced that Ahab had contemplated a future alliance with Ben-hadad. According to the records of Shalmaneser, Ben-hadad and Ahab formed a league and confronted him at Karkar on the river Orontes in the year 854 B.C., with an army of thirteen kings and thousands of men; 10,000 being the men of Ahab. Shalmaneser claimed a sweeping victory but as he did not continue his invasion until about twelve years later, the

38a. 1 Kings 20 39. Cornill History of Israel Page 105 40. Baily & Kent Loc. Cit
extent of his victory is questionable.

When the danger was past, Ben-hadad broke his truce, and one year after the battle of Karkar Ben-hadad and Ahab were back at war. Ahab was assisted in battle by Jehoshaphat the King of Judah. In consequence of a prediction made by one of his prophets, Micaiah, and knowing that he might be the target of warriors of Damascus if he wore his kingly armor, Ahab disguised himself as a common soldier, but was mortally wounded by an arrow of a Syrian common soldier who shot his arrow at venture. 41

Reign of Joram

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah who did not have the excellent qualities that his father had. The narratives say very little concerning him. After reigning over a year he succumbed to injuries sustained in a fall. Joram succeeded his brother Ahaziah. We do not have a clear order of events of his rule, but probably the first thing he was compelled to do was to defend Samaria against the siege of the Syrian under Ben-hadad 11. The Syrians had surrounded the city and had reduced it to famine, but the siege was lifted so suddenly that the Hebrews felt that a special intervention of divine power had caused them to flee away. A natural hypothesis seemed to be that a panic was aroused because of the report of the new Assyrian invasion which threatened Damascus.

There were several petty wars during the reign of Joram. About 850 B. C. the little nation of Moab which had long been a tributary to Israel arose in revolt against the weakened Kingdom of Israel. From a confused account of the Hebrew text, we assume that Israel and Judah formed a league and attempted to besiege Moab; but the Moabite

41. 1 Kings 22
King offered his first-born child as a sacrifice to his god. A reverse calamity fell upon the Israelite invaders and they retreated thinking that the human sacrifice offering had turned the Moabite god against them.

Joram made a renewed effort to regain Ramoth Gilead while the Syrians were engaged in defending their own country. Joram was wounded in this campaign and was forced to leave the siege under the direction of his general Jehu.

While Jehu was in his camp he was mysteriously approached by a prophet sent by Elisha to anoint and proclaim him King; his soldiers took up the proclamation and Jehu proceeded at once and killed Joram and Ahaziah, King of Judah, who was visiting him.

Reign of Jehu 843-816

The reckless, ruthless Jehu ascended the throne by committing the most spectacular wholesale murder that ever happened in the history of Israel. After killing the Kings of Israel and Judah, he proceeded to the Palace of Israel and had the Queen Mother Jezebel killed. He murdered all of the descendents of Ahab and any who had sympathy or any connection with the House of Ahab; all of the priests and Baal worshippers were destroyed. "Jehu's sword accomplished what Elijah's lightening and Elisha's plotting had not been able to effect. Baalism was destroyed root and branch." 43

Jehu secured his position as King from the descendants of Ahab but he had a more burdensome task of defending his throne from the Syrian aggressions. Further, his religious policies severed all the relations with Phoenicia. Shalmaneser II of Assyria made his appearance beyond the Lebanon in 842 B.C. and made another siege upon

42. Smith, H. P. Old Testament Hist. Page 196
43. Baily & Kent, History of Hebrew Commonwealth 175
...
The Syrians were probably able to turn back the Assyrians, but they lost everything but their capital. For three years Israel was protected from the Syrian aggression; but the Syrian Kingdom soon regained its strength and made successive invasions upon Israel and its neighbors to the south for thirty years or more.

The Reign of Jehoahaz 816-800 B.C.

Israel was the victim of hostile invasions throughout the reign of Jehu and his son Jehoahaz; Syria gained the entire district north of the river Arnon, and Hazael was only induced to spare Jerusalem by the payment of a heavy ransom. Hazael's son, Ben-hadad IIII attacked Samaria probably during the reign of Jehoahaz and left Israel with a meager military force of about ten chariots, fifty horsement and ten thousand foot soldiers; this was about the depth of humiliation.

Reign of Jehoash 800-785

During the reign of Jehoash the tide of disaster suddenly turned. While Assyria was busy in Campaigns against Media and elsewhere, the hitherto obscure Kingdom of Hazrak in northern Syria became strong and gave Damascus so much trouble that Damascus ceased its aggressions against Israel. Then Assyria, under Adad-Nirari IIII made his great invasion of the West conquering Edom, Philistia, Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, Israel and probably Judah. Damascus, was, however, the special object of the expedition; the other countries were made to pay rather light tributes, but Damascus paid such an enormous indemnity that it was permanently weak-

45. Ottley, A. L. History of the Hebrews 177
As soon as the Assyria army left, Jehoash took advantage of Syria's weakened conditions and administered three decisive victories upon Syria and regained all the cities that were lost. These successes were in a great measure due to the influence of Elisha whose activity, foresight and advice enabled Israel to maintain its morale through this period of misery and depression. This is probably the reason that the last of these narratives contain the dramatic statement made by Jehoash who wept over the death bed of Elisha and called him "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen, thereof".

\[\text{\textsuperscript{47}}\text{K}\text{nt} \& \text{B} \text{ailey Op. Cit Page 182}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{48}}\text{K} \text{ings 13;14}\]
CHAPTER VI

PURPOSE AND VALUE OF NARRATIVES

Purpose and Aim

In studying the historical survey of the Elijah and Elisha narratives, a twofold purpose can be clearly discerned in the narratives themselves - a religious and a political motive. The religious motive is primary and outstanding for the Hebrew nation itself was established and maintained through its intensive faith in its religious belief; Government, politics and all other factors were secondary to religion.

It is difficult to determine just what was the original purpose of these narratives as a whole because there were probably many authors, and too, several revisions were made upon them. The political motive seems to be more prominent in the Elisha narratives than in the Elijah narratives. The political motive may be predominant in the narratives that concern the political affairs of the Kingdom and center around the activities of the King. But even in these passages the prophets also played an important role as the advisers and announcers of the oracle of Jahweh; thus, fundamentally all of the narratives had a religious motive.

If the original writer of the Elijah narratives was one of the sons of the prophets who lived in the time of Elijah, probably his chief purpose in writing the narratives was merely to present the life of Elijah; later compilers and editors may have used it to express the religious motives rather than a history of the life of Elijah.

Burney, C. F. Notes on the Kings Page 209
The Elisha narratives are a compilation of so many anecdotes and independent narratives that it is almost improbable to determine what was the purpose and object of the original authors. It is not easy to definitely discern their purpose and object even in their present order. Some critics think that the Elisha stories were compiled in their present form so as to show that the prediction was true that Elisha would receive a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. This view is supported by the presence of so many miracles that surround the life of Elisha. Skinner suggests that some of the Elisha narratives appear to have the political motive predominant because the compiler may have added portions of an original political narrative to the life narratives of Elijah in order to form a political background for the ministry of Elisha. This view is probably more credible than the Wellhausen's suggestion that the passages were taken from a single historical work dealing with the important period from Ahab to Jehu; this view would mean that the purpose of the narrative was entirely political; that the prophets were only prominent because their activity was an influential factor in the political life of the time.

The entire Book of Kings by virtue of its contents belongs as much to the prophetical books as to the historical books. "It is not a continuous chronicle; it is a book of prophetic teaching, in which sometimes history, sometimes story, is employed as the vehicle of the teaching."  

50. Skinner, New Century Bible Page 29  
51. Ibid. Page 28  
This expression seems to bring out the keynote purpose of the Elijah and Elisha narratives. "This principle is that God works in history. Free-will is indeed given to men, but the divine providence overrules their actions, be they good, or be they evil." The narratives attempt to show the will of God being executed through history.

**Historical and Religious Value of Narratives**

There are three distinct types of historical literature. The first type is the "narratives" or descriptive type of histories whose object is to communicate or commemorate facts; the writer has no extraneous interest in his subject, but merely seeks to convey to his readers an accurate and vivid impression of the events which excited his attention. The second type of historical literature may be termed as "didactic" or "pragmatic" histories; the writer uses history for instruction or edification of their contemporaries; for political, patriotic, ethical or religious lessons. The third and more modern type of history is the scientific or genetic view of history which seeks to exhibit events in their true relation to the great spiritual and social movements to which they owe their ultimate significance. It has been discussed in preceding paragraphs that many of the narratives' principle motive seems to be an effort to narrate a series of events without any didactic purpose whatever; but on the whole it seems that the type of history that we have in the narratives is essentially

54. Skinner, Cambridge Bible  Page 5
The didactic type of history is of varied historical value when it is properly understood. One should not expect a natural sequence of events, nor a scientific analysis of phenomenal occurrences. One should expect a religious interpretation and predominance in all the accounts. Although this conception of history is not satisfactory to the modern scientific mind, it would be a mistake to discredit the entire account. The narratives are of historical value because they describe the social conditions of their day; the story of Naboth's vineyard manifested the unlimited and often unjust rule of the monarch. These narratives also show the prominence of the prophet in the government of the country; they vividly portray the religious, political, moral, and social life of Israel during that period.

These narratives form a reservoir of ethical lessons and religious values that shall abide through the ages. The main facts of the history in the Book of Kings convey the lesson of God's providence over the nations; but the stories contained in these narratives vary the lesson and apply it to individuals. These narratives mark a progressive step from nationalism to individualism.

The story of Elisha seeing Elijah's dramatic departure in a chariot of fire is suggestive of the truth of God's presence with his servant. This story and other stories as that of Elijah being fed by the ravens have been of great religious value because they have

55. 2 Kings 6:13-15
helped men and women throughout the ages who were in difficulty to realize the nearness of Divine help. 56

The New Testament forms a few special lessons from these narratives. Christ cites the stories of Elijah at Zarephath (1 King 17:9) and Elisha and Naaman (11 King 5:1) to show that Divine charity goes beyond the limits of the "Chosen People". 57 St. James and Paul also refer to the Elijah stories for illustrations.

Among the many lessons embodied in these narratives, the first lesson of abiding value is the necessity of faithfulness to the One God (1 King 18:21). The narratives suggest in their teaching that Jahweh is a just God who conducts a moral government of the world, punishing the wicked without respect of persons. 58 Throughout the narratives the value of prayer and faith are repeated manifested. The fundamental lesson of the narratives as well as the entire Book of Kings is a lesson in faith needed at all times—a faith that Jahweh maintains a supreme control over the destiny and affairs of the universe.

56. Barnes, W. E. Cambridge Bible Page 32
58. 1 Kings 21:17 ff
   Barnes, W. E. Cambridge Bible Page 36

END OF PART 1
PART XI

ELIJAH THE PROPHET
Stage of History

Jahweh religion faced one of the most critical periods in the history of Israel during the reigns of Omri and Ahab; it was on the threshold of being replaced by Israel for the heathen Baalism of Phoenicia. Omri had displayed much favoritism towards heathenism but never before in the history of Israel had Baalism received such marked sanction by the royalty, nor had its influence been so pronounced upon the public spirit of Israel; priests and prophets of Baalism were appointed in great numbers. It is quite evident that the cause of this rapid progress of this seductive religion was none other than the powerful and influential wife of Ahab, Jezebel. She was a zealous and ardent follower of Baalism and acted as missionary of that cult in Israel. Her zeal, royal power and dominating will-power enabled her to plant a rooting of Baalism that was difficult to destroy.

Probably the only representatives among the people who protested this rapid spread of Baalism were the prophets. But the prophets had lost their powerful influence upon Israel; not since the days of Samuel during the national movement had they succeeded in making any great impression upon the public life of the Hebrews. Their numbers increased into the hundreds and they became recognized by the government as important factors. But the prophetic orders became corrupt; many of them were "false prophets" who always attempted to prophesy in favor of the King. Individualism among
the prophets disappeared and the entire prophetic movement became merely a group of non-influential prophetic orders.

But the heathen worship fostered by the policy of Ahab stimulated the combined action of these prophets against the policy of the crown. But their protest against Baalism became so pronounced that Jezebel induced Ahab to issue orders for the violent destruction of all the prophets of Jahweh. This murderour royal order met with strong opposition among the righteous and faithful of the Jahweh religion; this is illustrated in the story of the royal steward, Obadiah, who concealed a hundred of the Jahweh prophets in two caves and kept them supplied with food. The people apparently were accepting the Baal worship, either willingly or by compulsion of royal influence and force.

But there was one prophet who did not go to cover nor did he remain silent or inactive. He was the only one who in this deepest extremity resisted the King with the most astonishing power, and the most unexpected success - this was the prophet Elijah. Ewald says that he "resisted him not with outward weapons, but with that single weapon which, if it once operates, is the most irresistible - the sword of the spirit."

The Biography of Elijah

Elijah was probably the loftiest prophet of the Old Testament, but his life biography is shrouded with mystery and uncertainty. His public life is sketched in a few narratives that are

3. 1 Kings 8:4, 13 11 Ewald History of Israel Page 66
4. Ewald History of Israel Page 66
wonderful for their vivid representations and graphic details: his personal history is full of human interest, but there is a lack of comprehensive and adequate treatment of his life. There is but a single brief reference to his origin, which is found in 1 Kings 17:1. But even that reference is not without ambiguity. Nothing is said of his parentage; Strachan says "he seems to be like Melchizedek 'without father, without Mother without genealogy' having neither beginning of days nor end of life."^ This incomplete or condensed account of his life in the present form may be explained by the fact that it was probably taken from another source, revised and placed in its present form.

The narrative begins by saying that Elijah was a Tishbite who was an "inhabitant" of Gilead or a "sojourner" of Gilead. We know nothing of the place, nor definitely where it was located. If Elijah was a "sojourner" of Gilead it does not necessarily mean that he was a native of Gilead; he could have been only a dweller there for a while. C. F. Burney interprets the term as meaning a foreigner who had been sojourning, probably for a short time merely, in the region east of the Jordan.  

Some scholars attempt to place the home of Elijah in a village called Thisbe of Naphtali which is mentioned in Tobit 1:2. This argument is built on the assumption that correct rendering of the Hebrew word in dispute means "sojourner" instead of "inhabitant!"

5. Strachan, Hasting's Bible Dictionary Vol. 1 Page 687
6. Burney, C. F. Notes on the Kings 216
7. Lumby, Cambridge Bible Page 130
   Strachan, Hasting's Bible Dictionary Vol. 1 Page 687
The greek manuscript makes the disputed word a proper name, and
reads "Elijah the Tishbite from Thesbon of Gilead". Most scholars accept this as the correct interpretation.

It seems that Elijah came from some little village named Tishbeh probably located in the wild but beautiful mountain district of Gilead, "the highlands of Palestine" on the eastern side of the Jordan bordering the desert.

As the narrative introduces the character in such an abrupt and sudden manner, we have Elijah entering upon the scene of activity as a sudden flash of fire which is very much in accord with his nature. Since it is probably quite true that we have only a re-modeled fragment of the original narrative of Elijah’s life, Ewald gives a suggestive introduction to replace the portion that the compiler eliminated:

"A crime of unexampled heinousness which Ahab made no attempt to prevent, has been committed by Jezebel. She had not only introduced the worship of Baal, but she has also destroyed the altars of Jahweh, and murdered the prophets who had so long been persecuted. Only one of them is left, Elijah, but he has long ago received from Jahweh on his consecration to the prophetic office, the promise that no man should have power to harm him and that he need not fear any one save Jahweh; and so in the midst of all the persecutions, while others hid themselves, he publicly displayed his constant zeal for Jahweh, unmolested and borne about as it were by Jahweh’s wind. But now the great blow has been struck; the altars of Jahweh have been overthrown his prophets are all slain, and, as though the whole creation were compelled to mourn such horrors, Jahweh commands the rain to abstain from falling in blessing upon men for many years. Deep and dreadful stillness broods over all. The prophets of Baal cannot draw from their idol the alleviation of their great need; and

8. Strachan Loc. Cit
Elijah has already received from Jahweh the command to hide himself altogether when he has once more reminded the King of the truth.\textsuperscript{10}

This suggestive introduction sheds much light upon the character of Elijah and makes an appropriate connection with the abrupt beginning in the narrative of 1 Kings 17:1.

Character and Personality

The historian does not furnish us with a character study of Elijah because such scientific procedure was not deemed as necessary in time of the compilation of the narratives. One must also be careful in forming a character study of Elijah based upon the material and contents in the narratives concerning him.

Elijah was probably a hermit who remained in the most impassable waste lands, wilderness and mountains in Israel. But owing to the antagonism of the monarch against the prophets of Jahweh, Elijah may not have remained in the wilderness because he was of the seclusive, hermit nature but because he was forced to remain in seclusion for the safety of his life. On the other hand such religious zealots were not uncommon and Elijah could have been as Bailey and Kent describes him, as "a rough, impetuous religious zealot from east of the Jordan, one who shunned society and appeared comet like from time to time as a harbinger of disaster. He was a wild looking man who had never cut his beard and hair, and whose clothes consisted of a shaggy sheep pelt."\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Ewald, History of Israel Page 104
\textsuperscript{11} Bailey & Kent, History of Hebrew Commonwealth Page 162
Such a suggestive detailed description of Elijah could only be made from an enlargement of certain suggestions which lie on the surface of the narratives.

There are features of his personality that we may be quite assured of. Elijah had a keen vision of perceiving hypocrisy and falsehood; this is illustrated in his encounter with Ahab; he was also bold, and discriminating in his speech. No doubt that Elijah was a stern, austere, religious zealot who felt that he was doing a religious act when he mercilessly slaughtered the prophets of Baal;13 This illustration is quite in harmony with the same type of stern personality that he is pictured to be in the story where he calls down fire to consume the soldiers of the King. Strachan speaks of his personality as having been partly formed by the lonely and wild desert lands that probably formed his early geographical environment: "Lonely mountains and bleak deserts were congenial to his spirit. He learned to dwell familiarly on the sterner aspects of religion and morality. He had the austere, ascetic, monotheistic spirit of the desert. He learned the fear of Jehovah which knew no other fear."15

12. 11 Kings 1:8
13. 1 Kings 18:40
14. 11 Kings 1.
CHAPTER IV

Survey of the Prophetic Activities of Elijah

The Judgement of Drought

The author has so arranged the text that Elijah makes a sudden dramatic debut into history; in the twinkling of an eye he is confronting the King predicting the vengeance of the Lord that will take the form of a drought that will last for some years until the prophet himself declared it at an end. 16

Some critics think that Elijah was facing Ahab in his palace court, but it is doubtful whether Elijah would have been so bold as to enter the royal places if Jezebel had at this time placed a ban on all Jahweh prophets. But the place of this meeting with Ahab and what was previously said before Elijah made this dramatic prediction could only be revealed by the contents of the original narratives. But if the decree was as it stands, Ahab quite likely recognized it as a Divine punishment against Israel for its sins of idolatry, and persecution of the Jahweh religion. The immediate effect of the appearance of Elijah before Ahab and his speech has not been made known to us; but after delivering the message the narratives state that he vanished into solitude.

The curse of the drought brought upon Israel aroused the anger of the King and Elijah had to seek refuge in a ravine through which flowed a stream of water during the rainy season. The narratives give the name of the place as "the brook of Cherith (east of

16. 1Kings 17:1
the Jordan). The exact location of this brook is not known. Tradition associates Cherith with the "Wadi-el-Kelt" in the neighborhood of Jericho; but this would not be in accord with the suggestive geographical reference which states that the brook was before (east) the Jordan. Probably the place was located somewhere near the native section of Elijah in Gilead.

The narrative states that his life was miraculously sustained by ravens which brought him food twice each day (1 Kings 17:2-6). But as the time went on this brook dwindled day by day under the scorching sun, and at last it became nothing but a dried gully stifled with heat. Elijah was directed "by the sword of Jahweh" to Zarephath, a village near Sidon in the heathen land of Tyre. He was received there by a poor but generous widow whom the drought had reduced to her last meal. The narratives state that she shared the last of her food with Elijah and he rewarded the widow's charity first by miraculously replenishing the widow's store of food and oil and later by restoring her child to life (verses 14-24).

Elijah's experience in Zarephath probably began to prepare him for a higher revelation which he was in due time to receive. It is thought that here the prophet learned to sympathize with one of another race, of a religion that he was sternly opposed to; that his stern nature was in some degree softened by contact with human suffering.

17. Skinner, New Century Bible  Page 224
During the period while Elijah was hiding in Zarephath, the King became enraged and searched far and near for Elijah but they could not find him (1 Kings 18:10). For three years there was no rain or dew in Israel; the famine became so severe the the King and his chamberlain or steward were compelled to search the country for grass for the royal stable. While on one of these quests Elijah suddenly appeared before Obadiah the King's servant and bid him to summon his master to him.

The meeting of the prophet and King was very dramatic; the King greeted Elijah with the haughty words, "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" Elijah answered the King's scornful speech with a scornful answer, stating that the troubler is not he himself who declared the doom but he (the King) who caused the doom by sin (verses 17-18).

The Events at Mount Carmel

Elijah rather abruptly challenges or commands that Ahab summon all of the priests of Baal to a contest between Jahweh and Baal on Mount Carmel. This mountain was probably believed to be sacred above all mountains, both by the Phoenician cult and the Jahweh followers, for both probably had altars there. Hence, it was probably the fittest place imaginable for a contest such as Elijah contemplated, between the rival claims to divinity of Jahweh and Baal.19

On the appointed day the King and the followers of Baal

gathered on Mount Carmel for the contest. There were about four hundred prophets of Baal who were maintained by the royal bounty in spite of the severe famine. Elijah proposed that two bullocks be prepared and laid on the altar without placing any fire beneath them; "the God who answereth by fire, let him be God" (1 Kings 18:24). The narrative states that the Baal priests prayed in ecstatic frenzy to Baal from morning until evening without avail. But in the evening Elijah only offered a calm prayer and Jahweh sent down a fire that consumed the offering and even the water that surrounded it. This proved that Jahweh was the supreme and only God, and all the people claimed Jahweh as God. In this excess of irrepressible zeal Elijah causes all of the prophets of Baal to be taken down from the mountain and slain (verses 38-40).

As the drought had come by the sword of Elijah, its end came by the answers to his fervent prayer on Mount Carmel; before night fell there was a sudden tempest of rain that arose before Ahab could return to Jezebel, sixteen miles away. In the midst of this rain the prophet was seized with a sudden impulse caused by the emotion of triumph; with strength above nature he ran like a courier in front of the royal chariot all the sixteen miles from Carmel to the gates of Jezreel (verses 42-46).

Elijah's Experience at Horeb. 1 Kings 19

Elijah rejoiced in the belief that the great battle for Jahweh had been won and that his task was accomplished. But before the
day was over the Queen Jezebel sent him a threatening message that she would avow her vengeance upon him for the deaths of the prophets of Baal. Barnes, suggests that the Queen probably intended to put Elijah to flight by sending him the message; it would have been absurd to put him to death at the moment of his great triumph. 20

Elijah became terrified at the threat of Jezebel and fled for his life, for he knew that a woman of the character of Jezebel was none too good to have him murdered. But the question arises, why did Elijah flee from danger? Why did not such a man who was stern and brave at heart remain and face his fate? Of course Elijah had fled from the wrath of the King before; he knew too well that it would be certain death to remain. But another suggestion to why he fled was that he was discouraged; his sanguine hope for the restoration of the true religion is changed in a moment into black despair.

Elijah fled to Beersheba in Judah, and leaving his servant there in Beersheba, he plunged into the solitary wilderness. Weary, famished, discouraged, he lay down under a desert bush and prayed that Jahweh would take his life away. The narratives state that while Elijah was asleep an angel awoke him and gave him food and drink which was sufficient to last him on a forty days' journey to Mount Horeb (probably Sinai). He probably came there because Horeb may have still been considered as the abode of Jahweh.

The following portion of the narrative is said to be spirit-

ually one of the profoundest narratives in the old Testament. Elijah is commanded to go upon the mountain of Horeb and while there God appears before Elijah in an theophany. There is a great wind, and then a great quake and next a fire. But Jahweh was in neither the wind, nor quake, nor fire. At last Jahweh spoke in a low gentle whisper, asking Elijah why he was there? Elijah poured forth his complaint against his people; Jahweh comforted him and showed him that he still had a great work for him to do; "he must shape the destinies of two great nations and provide for the continuance of the prophetic succession."21

Jahweh gave three commands to Elijah; to anoint Hazael to be King over Syria; to anoint Jehu to be King over Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (1 Kings 19:15-16). This prediction has caused quite a bit of comment among the Old Testament critics. The question arises, why was Elijah appointed to anoint Hazael, an enemy to Israel, as King in a foreign country, Syria? The problem is not easy to solve; W. E. Barnes suggests that the three commands were schemes to uproot Baal worshippers. In the first place Ahab was to be attacked from without by the Syrians, and for this purpose the warlike Hazael was to take the throne of Ben-hadad, whose martial spirit had been quenched, secondly, when Ahab was then weakened, the soldier Jehu, perhaps in connivance with the Syrians, was to take his throne. The followers of Baal would either be killed by the sword of Hazael or by the sword of Jehu (verse 17). In the third place the vigorous

Elisha was to be appointed as Elijah's successor to work under Jehu and complete the work that Elijah had started.

The whole course of events was quite different from the prediction that was made in verse 17. The sword of Hazael did not precede, but followed the sword of Jehu; moreover Hazael almost destroyed Jehu who was to be the champion of Jahweh. This discrepancy illustrates the freedom and idealism of Old Testament prediction, and it indicates that the author of the passage lived at an early date probably before the inverted partial fulfillment of the prediction. At least, it does not seem probable that a later writer inverted the idea with an eye on its fulfillment.

Circumstances seem to have prevented Elijah from fulfilling the first two commands because he lacked the proper amount of courage at that time; and while he hesitated the opportunity passed and the times and circumstances changed.

This view, however, could be used as an explanation of his failure to anoint Jehu and Hazael but there are other reasons that were more likely to have been the cause than this explanation. But before proceeding with the discussion of other probabilities there are certain vital considerations that should be treated here. In the first place, who was the author of this "divine" prediction? The preceding argument would eliminate it as being the invention of a late writer, and there is little or no reason to say that one of the prophetic sons or some contemporary writer near the time.

of Elijah could have inserted the story. Therefore, it seems that Elijah himself, through divine inspiration, was the originator of the threefold command.

If it is granted that this great religious and political scheme was formed by the inspired Elijah while he was meditating alone upon Mount Horeb, then we must discard the popular view that Elijah was a hermit who cared little about the affairs of men. This scheme would indicate that Elijah was thoroughly acquainted with the political conditions of the times, and that he had the political insight of a diplomat. Thus, it is not altogether impossible that Elijah, similar to Elisha, was once quite familiar around the court of the King, but was probably driven into hiding after the Jahweh religion was attacked by the crown.

The Call of Elisha

After Elijah had his faith restored upon Mount Horeb, he proceeded to fulfill his task. He returned across the wilderness in the direction of Damascus; and near the town of Abel-Meholah he found Elisha ploughing in the field. This indicates that Elijah probably knew where Elisha lived and probably knew of his character and ability. Elijah approached Elisha and placed his mantle over Elisha's shoulders apparently without saying a word. This was symbolic action proclaiming Elisha as his "son" and investing him with the prophetic office.
Elisha was probably amazed and stupified by the sudden necessity for such a tremendous decision. But he could not hesitate long for it seemed that the mysterious prophet Elijah had continued on his way without looking back. Elisha ran and overtook him, and requested that he be allowed to bid farewell to his parents before he left to follow Elijah as his disciple. From this time on Elijah was probably never alone, but he had a companion who later became his successor and completed his task.

Naboth's Vineyard 1 Kings 21

The chapter that contains this story forms a break in the connection between chapter 20 and 22 in the present text. In previous discussions it was shown how some scholars regard this chapter as another narrative by another author, but most critics believe it to be a continuation of chapter 17-19. Some critics think that the event really happened during the later years of Elijah near the end of his activity.

The story states that a certain citizen of the town, named Naboth, owned a vineyard which probably adjoined the King's estate. The King attempted to induce Naboth to sell his property at its value but Naboth refused to sell because he had inherited the land from his fathers and it would be contrary to his religious custom to part from it. The King became very angry and felt frustrated at the unexpected thwarting of his wish. His wife, Jezebel, came to his assistance; she planned an ingenious scheme
to have Naboth accused of high treason before the citizens of the town and thus had him and all his sons put to death. After Naboth was killed the King proceeded in state to take possession of the coveted vineyard of Naboth. But just as Ahab was about to take possession of the land, Elijah made his mysterious sudden appearance in the very flush of Ahab's satisfaction.

The narrator very skillfully represents Ahab's indignation with dramatic power. Ahab spoke to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, oh mine enemy?" and Elijah answered with sarcastic placidity "I have found thee." Elijah proceeded to promise the doom of Ahab for his guilt: his house shall fall; dogs shall eat the carcass of Jezebel; the King's whole posterity shall perish, and their bodies given to the dogs (1 Kings 21:20-26).

This story reveals Elijah as the defender of the common man the champion of social justice. This great crime produced a decided change in the attitude of the public towards the house of Ahab. Elijah had the insight to see that this act of tyranny was in reality a crime against the religious heritage and moral sense of the nation. "As Moses was the first, so Elijah was the second great champion of social justice and democracy."25

Elijah's conflict with Ahaziah

The remaining stories of Elijah's life are in legendary form but probably reveal the essence of historical events. These narratives differ widely in spirit, language and style. Strachan des-

24. Kings 11 9:26
25. Baliley & Kent History of the Hebrew Commonwealth Page 166
cribes the following narrative as one of those "imaginative apologies - abundant in the schools of the scribes - which borrowed the names of ancient heroes to lend vividness and concreteness to abstract doctrines."

According to the narrative in 2 Kings 1, Ahaziah, the successor to Ahab, fell and injured himself. He sent messengers to the shrines of Baal-Zebub, God of Ekron, to inquire if he would recover from his injuries. While on their way the messengers met Elijah. The messengers did not seem to know who Elijah was; the mysterious suddenness of his appearance, the solemnity of his manner, the authority with which he spoke probably overpowered them. They speedily returned to the King bearing his emphatic and stern message stating, "thou shall die!" The enraged King sent three bands of soldiers to seize the prophet, but the narrative claims Elijah called down fire from heaven and consumed the first two bands of soldiers; the captains of the third group of soldiers pleaded to Elijah that their lives be spared. Elijah departed with them and went and repeated his message of doom to the King in person and apparently left unscathed. This is the last public act of Elijah as recorded in the narratives.

The Translation of Elijah 2 Kings 2:1-18

The closing scene of Elijah's life as recorded in the Biblical narratives is wrapped in more mystery than the beginning of his
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colorful activity. This narrative has the same lofty literary style as the narratives in 1 Kings 17-19; Ewald regarded it as the work of the same writer of the narratives in 1 Kings 17-19; but more recent critics from a literary point of view consider the story to be closely connected or either an introduction to the Elisha narratives.

It seems that Elijah had been divinely warned that his departure was near at hand. Elijah accompanied by Elisha, his constant companies, paid a series of farewell visits to the prophetic communities in the Jordan Valley vicinity, at Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho. The narrative suggests that the prophets of these guilds had also been divinely warned of the approaching departure of Elijah. Elijah and Elisha approached the river of Jordan and Elijah smote the waters as Moses did the waters of the "Red Sea"; the waters divided and the two friends crossed on dry ground.

Elisha who persistently refused to leave his master, asks as a last request that he should be endowed with success. Elijah hesitatingly gave him a conditional answer: if a spiritual vision is vouchsafed to him, then he will know that his wish is granted. Suddenly, as they walked (probably upwards) towards the eastern hills "behold there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven."  

28. Ewald, History of Israel Page 109  
29. Skinner, New Century Bible Page 277  
Strachan, Hasting's Bible Dictionary Vol. 1 Page 690  
30. Skinner, New Century Bible Page 277  
31 11 Kings 2:12
Elisha understood the significance of the vision as being the answer to his request of receiving the spirit of Elijah. Elisha picked up the fallen mantle of Elijah and returned to the river of Jordan and repeated the miracle of dividing the Jordan, thus proving himself successor to Elijah. The narrative claims that about fifty prophets witnessed these events, and when they saw that Elisha had received the power of Elijah, they bowed and paid homage to him as their prophetic leader. But the prophets entertained some doubt concerning the ascension of Elijah and sent forth a party of fifty men who searched the entire area for the body of Elijah but could not find it; the fruitlessness of these searchers caused the unbelievers to believe.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{32}\) Ewald, History of Israel Page 111
CHAPTER III

The Miracles of Elijah

The Question of Miracles

One cannot present an adequate treatise of these narratives unless a special study is made concerning the miraculous elements in them. Roughly speaking the miracles of the entire Old Testament can be grouped with those associated with Moses and Joshua, and those associated with Elijah and Elisha. Thus, the miraculous elements in these narratives are significant factors in relation to a critical study of the narratives.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to present a comprehensive study of the question of miracles as it would demand a too elaborate discussion of a question that has not as yet been satisfactorily answered.

There are many definitions of miracles but in the final analysis they all have the essence of one philosophical thought: A miracle is "the event that cannot be accounted for in accordance with the forces of nature and the mind of man as we know them." A more common definition of the term miracle is, "an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws (or order) of nature." There are many arguments concerning the question whether or not miracles can happen - would the Supreme Being transverse his own law and order of nature? The answer would certainly be no. But the question arises does a miracle necessarily mean

33. McCollach Hasting's Enc. of Religion Vol. 8, Page 679
34. Gordon, G. A. Religion and Miracles Page 24
a deviating from the laws of nature? William Sunday asks does a miracle have to be "abnormal"? 35 If we define Miracle as the trespassing of the law of nature, then we must say that is seems improbable that a miracle could happen. But we cannot judge whether an event was in accord with the laws of nature because we do not know all of the laws of nature; neither do we know that it is the only possible order; that it could not be a part of a greater order. Therefore, an event may be a miracle to us because it appeared contrary to the laws of nature as we knew them but not as the Creator knew them. A miracle would thus be a beneficial and intelligent control and guidance of existing forces by a supreme spiritual power, in accordance with law that may be unfamiliar to man. 36

Miracles may be grouped into two classes; they may be grouped as Schleiermacher suggests, "relative miracles", and as "real" miracles. The relative miracles are to be explained with reference to the mind of the age which it occurred and to the insight and power of the person working the miracle. 37 It is that event which at one time appeared to man as a phenomenon, but as civilization progressed man later found it to be in accord with the law of nature as he knew it. The Ten Plagues in the time of Moses were probably considered as a divine miracle, but we can readily see how such occurrences might be brought about through the operation of the ordinary forces of nature. The real miracles would include those events

35. Sunday, Wm. Divine Overruling Page 66
37. Gordon Religion and Miracles Page 25
that actually happened which apparently were contrary to the law of nature as we know it.

In discussing the miracles that are recorded in the Elijah and Elisha narratives, there are two things that must be considered and distinguished; was the first event or incident a fact, and if so what about the interpretation that was placed on that fact? There is a grave possibility that some of the miracles never happened and that the writer himself knew that they did not happen but recorded them for a religious purpose. H. Gunkel would classify this as a "aetiological" legend, that is a legend written for a purpose.38 The second point in regard to interpretation of the fact has already been alluded to in the discussion on the "relative" miracle.

It must be remembered that Elijah and Elisha live in an age of spiritual upheaval; great wickedness and piety came into conflict. It was a day that the people had magical minds and perhaps nothing short of a miraculous sign would have satisfied the minds of that day that Jahweh was God, or that Elijah and Elisha were the prophets of the Divine Being. The miracles of Elijah and Elisha were their credentials. It cannot be said that these miracles are essential to history, nor can it be said that all of them are on the lofty level which are conspicuously so in the Christ miracles; many of them appear to be of the nature of Jewish Haggadoth rather than of sober history.40

38. Gunkel, H. Legends of Israel Page 25
39. 11 Kings 2:14-16.
40. Hasting's Bible Dictionary Vol. 3 Page 393
Food from the Ravens 1 Kings 17:3-7

The narrative states that Elijah was fed morning and night by ravens while he was hiding at the brook of Cherith. The narrative is of a higher literary quality, and it is quite probable that there is an essence of truth in the story, but the interpretation made by the author may be subjected to questioning. It is very clear that the author believed that the event was a miracle.

Many attempts have been made to interpret the Hebrew term 'R b h y m (רְבֵּיהָמָ) as meaning merchants or arabsians by a change of the vowels as found in Ezekiel 27:27. But this explanation has not been accepted as satisfactory. Caravans keep away from wild torrents, says Lumby. If the author or compiler thought that Elijah was fed by the arabsians or some other people, most likely he would have made a clearer statement relating to such fact. However, it is possible that the vowels were mixed through compilation of the narratives.

Some critics have attempted to explain the event of wonder through natural means. J. D. Michaelis and other scholars of the old school claim that Elijah was located in a vicinity that was filled with ravens and that Elijah could have eaten the ravens. On the other hand the raven was considered an unclean bird and it is doubtful whether Elijah was starved enough to break his religious custom for the mean of "unclean" meat. Other theories suggest that he fed upon the food that the ravens brought their young.

41. Lumby Cambridge Bible Page 181
42. Keil and Bertheau Commentary on Kings Page 271
43. Lumby Cambridge Bible Page 181
Keil and Bertheau Loc. Cit.
But the passage states that the ravens brought "bread and flesh" morning and evening (verse 6). It was quite improbable that ravens could have found that much bread twice daily in a time of famine in Israel. The present form of the story eliminates any attempt to explain or to rationalize the incident on natural grounds. Therefore, we can only conclude that one of the following theories explains the facts of the incident: (1) that there was a textual error made in the compilation of the narratives; (2) the narrator may have misinterpreted a historical fact, (3) the event was a real miracle, (4) the story may have been a myth comparable with such myths of the heathens, as Cyrus was suckled by a dog, Romulus and Remur by a she-wolf, Pelias fed by a horse, and other myths.

Replenishing of the Widows Food Supply

The narrative states that Elijah went to a widow woman in Zarephath who had only enough meal in her barrel for just one cake of bread. Elijah asked for a portion of the last food she had left, promising her that Jahweh would provide food for them until the drought was over.

A few scholars of the older school made attempts to explain this incident under natural conditions. But most of the modern scholars are of the opinion that the story of Elijah visiting the widow is based upon a historical fact, but that the miraculous element was probably added to the original and historical kernel of the
story. This view is supported by the fact that some of the Elisha stories seemed to model after the Elijah stories and have the same elements and in some cases almost the identical stories reappear in enlarged proportions.

Restoration of the Widow's Son

The narrative states that the son of the widow became very ill; "and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him". Josephus interprets this expression as if the youth were only seemingly dead. If this event was a historical fact it is quite possible that the child could have been thought dead; but there is little or no doubt that the author of the narrative in its present form sought to describe the case as one of death.

Many critics regard this story in the same light of the preceding miracle; it too is duplicated in the Elisha narrative. This story may be based upon the historical fact just as the preceding story, however, it is possible that it could have been a miracle just as the Christ stories of the resurrection of the dead are regarded to be miracles.

The Miracle on Mount Carmel 1 Kings 18:20-40

One of the outstanding events in the life of Elijah as recorded in the narratives would be the miraculous victory that occurred on Mount Carmel, when the "fire of the Lord fell" and consumed the offering that Elijah made in attempting to prove that Jahweh was God.

44. 1 Kings 17:17
45. Lumby Cambridge Bible Page 183
46. See Verse 21.
Scholars have presented varied opinions and arguments concerning the event but none have been accepted in general. There are four different suggestive explanations or theories that one might consider as an explanation of this unusual event which is recorded in the Elijah narratives; the first three views are based upon the theory that the story treats a historical fact or event.

Many scholars, like J. Skinner, are of the opinion that the story is probably true in its present form; that it was a historical fact accompanied with a "real" miracle. Some of these critics are of the opinion that there was such a religious crisis at that age, that nothing less than a miracle of some sort could have convinced the men of that age that Jahweh was God.

A second view may be based upon the theory of "relative" miracles. Several critics have attempted to explain the miracle as a natural event that was misinterpreted either by the eye-witnesses of the event or by the narrator. Most of these theories have been proven unsatisfactory and some rather absurd; "to the mind of one commentator they have actually suggested the grotesque idea that naphtha was used!" quotes Skinner. C. F. Kent and others claim that what Elijah thought was fire from Heaven was really lightning. It is quite probable that the Hebrews could have referred to lightning as the fire from Jahweh. But even if it was lightning that consumed the offering of Elijah, we must admit that such an unusual

47. Skinner, J. New Century Bible
48. Hastings Bible Dictionary Vol. 3 Page 393
49. Skinner, J. New Century Bible Page 234
50. Gen. 19:24
behavior of "light ning" as expressed in the narratives, would have to be considered as a miracle.

A third possibility concerning the event is that a legendary miraculous coloring was added to this historic event or to some similar event. This view is accepted by those who believe that the event was historical but cannot account for the miraculous elements that are in the story.

A fourth possibility is that the entire story is a myth. Only a few critics accept this view, yet there are a few suggestions that should be considered. It is a very conspicuous fact that fire plays such a prominent part in the Elijah and Elisha stories and in other stories of the Old Testament and ancient legends. It is also possible that the story could have been an "aetiological" legend illustrating the supremacy of Jahweh over Baalism; but it is hardly conceivable that such a story could have been invented with such vivid descriptions and convincing force of style. On the other hand it is quite significant that the event, unlike the story of Naboth, is mentioned in no other place in any known records. It is quite queer that such a prominent event should have made no greater impression than it seems to have made. Ewald and other critics believe that if the event had been as recorded in the narratives that this event would have probably been the crowning success of Elijah in the minds of the people instead of the Naboth story which probably flared the flames of the revolution. These arguments are a bit enlightening, but
they lack weight as being proofs that the narrative story was entirely a myth.

Other miracles of Elijah

The remaining stories of miraculous elements found in second Kings concerning Elijah seem to be by another author, and seem to be more enwrapped in legendary form than the other narratives in First Kings. Most critics agree that the story of Elijah's unmercifully calling down the fire from Heaven to devour the Kings soldiers as told in 11 Kings 1:9ff is a too extravagant display of superhuman power. The contents of the story itself seem to be contradictory and unclear, and quite definitely appear to be a religious saga.

The departure of Elijah from the stage of history is shrouded with as much mystery as his first appearance in history. Elijah divides the water of the Jordan with a stroke of his mantle very similarly to that of Moses when he crossed the Red Sea. The narratives state that while Elijah and Elisha were walking along together a chariot of fire with horses of fire parted them asunder and Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind (11 Kings 2:1-18). It is impossible to form a rational explanation of this event; most scholars are of the opinion that the story is entirely legendary or mythical. Only the most conservative group accept the story as it is. Ewald is of the opinion that the narrative story was the result of added legends in a later period.
"He now ranked with Enoch, or as others made out, with Moses, and was supposed to continue in Heaven a mysterious life which no death had ever interrupted, and therefore to be ready at any time to return to earth." 51

51. Ewald History of Israel Page 113
CHAPTER IV
The Nature and Religious Value of Elijah's Contribution

Fundamental Teachings

It is quite difficult to point out the direct teachings of Elijah because he was not so much of a teacher or preacher as he was a religious hero. He did not preach any new doctrine about Jahweh, but at a critical moment he saw what loyalty to the cause of Jahweh demanded; and of that cause he became champion, not by mere words, but by his life. Elijah did not have time to write his messages; the situation of his time demanded action rather than words. The teachings that we are to receive from Elijah are not derived from his messages or his own words but from his activity, his importance lies in his personality. Hastings quotes that "he is not to be valued for what he said, but what he did; not because he created but because he destroyed." 53

There are any number of more or less direct or indirect teachings that can be drawn from the history of Elijah as stated in the narratives; but there are a few of the implied teachings that we may well class as even abiding truths. There seemed to have been two outstanding ideals which remained foremost in the life of Elijah; that Jahweh is the only God for Israel, and justice is greater than Kingship. 54 It should be observed that it is these to two ideals, which the monarchy at that time was opposed. . Jezebel

52. Smith, W. R. The Prophets of Israel Page 31
53. Hastings, J. Greater Men and Women of the Bible
54. Bailey & Kent Hebrew Commonwealth Page 167
the evil genius and Queen of Ahab, used all of her royal power
to destroy the Jahweh religion and establish Baalism; thus, it
was the mission of Elijah to form the opposition and destroy Baal-
ism at any cost.

One of the most outstanding and ever abiding truths taught
by Elijah was that Jahweh is not only the supreme God but the only
God in existence. This view is rejected by many critics because
of the opinions that Elijah was a monolatrist rather than a mono-
theist, that Jahweh may have been the supreme God, but not the only
God. But it seems quite unreasonable to believe that Elijah's
irony was offered in a spirit of absolute monotheism when he was
on Mount Carmel; from the context of his words, he plainly implies
that Baal is no God at all. 55

Knudson points out how Elijah reaffirmed in a striking way
the righteousness of God in the story of Naboth's vineyard. 56 But
we may note that this story not only teaches the righteousness of
God but the justice of God. Elijah teaches that the fundamental
rights of the common man must be repeated and regarded even though
converse to the desire and lusts of the King. This teaching was al-
ways in harmony with the prophetic spirit from the beginning but had
never been emphasized as Elijah did.

Knudson suggests another prophetic teaching that probably
originated with Elijah and that was the message that was given to
him on Mount Horeb. 57 The message of doom—doo upon Israel as

55. 1 Kings 13:27
56. Knudson, Prophetic Movement Page 37
a whole for its apostasy. The message of doom had been preached by previous prophets but it was a doom of individual; and not the doom of a nation.

The Work and Contribution of Elijah

Kent suggests that the work of Elijah in itself was very little; that he did very little reforming himself, but was the main factor in starting the reformation. One writer suggested that probably the greatest thing that Elijah did was to anoint Elisha to do what he was not gifted to do. This statement is probably a little exaggerated and if not regarded in its true meaning, would seem to lessen the work of Elijah. It may be true that Elijah did not have the personal qualifications to succeed in completing his great task, and further more, the opportune time did not come during the period of his prophetic ministry. But granting these things to be true we must consider this outstanding fact; that although Elijah was unable to accomplish his great task himself, the spirit of his teachings was closely followed by those who did succeed in finishing the task.

Some critics do not present a high estimation of the historical importance of Elijah; Wellhausen thinks that his influence is praised too highly in the biblical narratives. Wellhausen also thinks that the prophets were completely overshadowed by the Kings in the eyes of their contemporaries; that only in later times did they become the principal personages. But Wellhausen states no convincing reasons for this interesting view, and there are several re-

ferences that indicate that the prophets were still held in high esteem, probably more than the King, among some groups.

Elijah is probably foremost of those great religious leaders of Israel called prophets. "He introduces into prophecy" says Kittel 59 "that species of categorical imperative which distinguishes him as well as the later prophets, that brazen inflexibility, that diamond like hardness of character which bids them to hold fast by their moral demand, even should the nation be dashed to pieces against it". Elijah paved the way for the later prophets, he was the forerunner of the great social reformers of succeeding generations, who defined religion not merely in terms of belief and ritual but also in terms of justice and mercy. 60

Elijah settled for once and always the question of the supremacy of Jahweh as God of Israel; from this period onward the supremacy of Jahweh as God of Israel, is assailed no longer. Whether this accomplishment was the result of the victory of Jahweh over the Syrian Baal as told in the narratives; or other prophetic activities were the principal factors in establishing this belief remains to be said. But the establishing of the belief may be credited to the work of Elijah.

The work of Elijah continued after he left the scene of his labors; his greatest achievement was made after his death. His spirit animated Elisha, Jehu and hundreds of the sons of the prophets. The idolatrous house of Ahab fell by the sword of the re-

59. Hastings, Great Men and Women of the Bible Page 406
60. Kent, C. F. Kings and Prophets of Israel Page 29
formers; Baalism was wiped out by the sword as well as by the spirit. There was no more danger of Baalism becoming the national religion; it sank into a superstition of a sect known to later prophets as "the remnant of Baalism". It was Elijah's uncompromising and aggressive loyalty to Jahweh that led the Jews of a later day to place his name at the head of all prophets.

61. Zephaniah 1:4
PART III

ELISHA, SUCCESSOR TO ELIJAH
ELISHA, THE SUCCESSOR TO ELIJAH

Chapter I

Life and Career of Elisha

Biography and Character

Elisha (my God is salvation) was the disciple and successor to the great prophet Elijah. According to 1 Kings 19:16,19 he was born near Abel-Meholah a town in the Jordan Valley. He was the son of Shaphat, probably a wealthy land owner. Little else is known of Elisha's early life. According to references of the narratives he remained active in the prophetic ministry over forty five years. Much of the biography of his life was probably written in the original source material, and could have been overlooked by the compiler of the narratives in their present form.

The inspiration of Elisha came direct from the great champion of Jahweh's cause, Elijah. The companionship and close affiliation between the two covered a period of about seven years. But the contrast between Elijah and Elisha was very great in every phase. In appearance Elijah was hairy, half naked and probably impulsive; but Elisha was bald, conservatively clothed and rather composed.

The background and early environment of the two men seem to have been contrasting. Elijah was reared in the wild rugged hills of Gilead; thus, he loved the solitude of the hills, and shunned the life of the city. Elisha on the other hand had been brought up in
the quiet peaceful valley of the Jordan. He loved to mix with
the people; his popularity was evidenced by the farewell feast
which was given him when he began his prophetic ministry with
Elijah. Unlike Elijah, Elisha probably had a house of his own
in Samaria and was accessible to Kings and those of the public
who wished to see him. Elisha was always faithful to the work
of Jahweh and stern in his rebuke, but he was always ready to
help the King against his foes. This was an exceptional and
interesting contrast between the character of the two men; Eli-
jah seemed to Ahab and Ahaziah to be a personal enemy, one to be
hunted and destroyed; Elisha, though held in awe and respect
because of his prophetic powers, was regarded as a personal friend
of the King; he was sent for and consulted concerning political
plans. Elisha seems to have been loved by rulers and people
alike.

Elisha must have been a friend to the poor for most of his
miracles were in aid of the poor; they were for the individuals
rather than the public. No doubt his constant spirit of helpful-
ness and fundamental good-will was the basis for his popularity and
success as a revolutionist.

There is little doubt that the character and personality
of the two men were much in contrast, but in the appraisal of the
ccharacter of these two men, we should not fail to consider the

1.Kings I 19:16-21
fact that the men lived in two different periods in which rapid changes were made. The hostility of the rulers under the influence of Jezebel made it impossible for Elijah to remain on friendly terms with the King; The nation was becoming so engrossed in the Baal religion that a prophet of Jahweh became neglected and lost much of his prestige and influence; not only did they become unpopular but were subjected to be put to death by the Queen. Although it must be admitted that the two men differed in their personality and were of a contrasting nature, it is quite probable that in some instances the actions of Elisha would have been similar to the actions of Elijah under similar circumstances which prevailed during the time of Elijah.

The Times of Elisha

The victory of Elijah on Mount Carmel was not as complete as many would think; apparently Baalism continued to exist and develop. Even if we grant that this event was a historical occurrence, it still seems clear that the triumph was only temporary and that the victory was not as decisive as the narrative suggests. On the other hand it seems that this occurrence and other successes of Elijah aroused and stimulated the religious leaders to follow up the pursuit of the object and aim which he was the first to indicate. Prophetic guilds sprang up in large numbers; they became closely organized and did much in executing the plans of Elijah in casting out Baalism from Israel.
Elisha began his real prophetic ministry about 850 B.C., near the beginning of the reign of Jehoram (or Joram). Jehoram seemed to have a greater respect for the worship of Jahweh than his ancestors; although his Mother Jezebel was still alive, he removed from the temple of Baal at Samaria the lofty column and the image of Baal which stood in front of it. But Jehoram must have made only a partial reformation, if any, because Tyrian Baalism was in full exercise at the time of the revolution of Jehu.

The political situation at Israel was as bad or worse than the corrupt religious situation which prevailed. The first period of the reign of Joram was so disturbed externally that he had every inducement to treat the leaders and prophets of Jahweh prudently. Moab rebelled and Joram was unable to regain control of the little Kingdom. The unfortunate issue of this campaign was probably the cause of Ben-hadad making a siege against Samaria the following year. Benhadad surrounded the city and caused a famine by cutting off all of its supplies. Elisha began his ministry while Baalism was still predominant, the country was in disorder and tumult; its army was not strong enough to withstand the successive sieges of its many foes. Thus Elisha had a great opportunity to become not only a religious reformer but also a great patriot for his country.

CHAPTER II

Literary Approach to Prophetic Activity of Elisha

Most critics are of the opinion that Elisha did not contribute any new idea to the stream of prophetic thought. Many of the
critics and writers regard the work of Elisha as being so insignificant that they fail to treat it apart from the greater work of his master, Elijah. Much of this may be due to the excessive legendary material that predominates the narratives concerning his life.

It is impossible to arrange the events of the life of Elisha in chronological sequence; the topography of the narrative is often precise but there is a definite lack of dates and historical names. Many localities are indicated with precision which a later age could no longer distinguish; and among all of the reigning Kings it is only once that any of them are alluded to by name.  

The Elisha narratives are quite similar to the Elijah narratives in their form and arrangement; they seem to be narratives taken from the original biography of Elisha and inserted with political and historical narratives. Wellhausen is of the opinion that these political narratives are of the same authorship as those in 1 Kings Chapters 20 and 22; but Kittel, Benzinger and other critics hold that these political passages serve as a background for the Elisha episodes and are to be regarded as the original parts of the "biography of Elijah". This view is based upon the fact that the interest is focused more around the prophet in the historical narratives of Elisha than those narratives found in 1 Kings, 20, 22.

2. Ewald, History of Israel Page 84
   Hastings, J. Greater Men and Women of the Bible Vol. 3 page 412
3. Kings 11 Page 3
The life of Elisha in the Book of Kings is found to be in a cycle of twelve narratives of miracles, these narratives are so arranged in such a manner as to suggest that they were performed by Elisha during the reign of Jehoram covering a period of about twelve years. But most critics estimate that Elisha lived about forty-five years after the reign of Joram. Since the popularity and influence of Elisha were continually on the increase, most likely the legendary fragments would contain recollections from the whole of Elisha's career.

A close examination of the Elisha narratives will almost convince one that the life of Elisha is given from two or more distinct sources. One of these sources is of the high literary type that is found in 1 Kings 20, 22; the other source seems to be a series of narratives of legendary character loosely linked together, and so arranged according to the connection of their contents, and to end off in round numbers. Since there is little or no chronological sequence to the life of Elisha as recorded in the narratives, an attempt shall be made to treat his life separately as recorded in the political narratives and in the miraculous narratives.

CHAPTER III

THE PUBLIC ACTIVITY OF ELISHA

The Siege of Moab

The first of Elisha's public activity in the service of

5. Ewald, History of Israel  Page 87
6. Ewald, History of Israel  Page 85
his country was when he was found to be present in the allied armies of Israel, Judah and Edom in their campaign against Mesha, the King of Moab. Elisha was not discovered until the armies began to suffer seven days for lack of water in the barren districts on the shore of the Dead Sea. When the three Kings came to him for his counsel, he refused at first to give counsel and support from Jahweh to a King who still tolerated the prophets of Baal as the King of Israel did. But out of respect to Jehosaphat, the King of Judah, he consented to give his advice. He commanded them to dig trenches and prophesied that though they would see no rainfall, yet the valley would be filled with water. His orders were obeyed and the next morning all of the pits were filled with water.

Several critics attempt to explain this miracle as a natural phenomenon; Strachan thinks that the water was the result of floods formed by swelled torrents caused by rains in the high mountains of Moab. But Skinner claims that the region is known to be so peculiarly developed that water from the mountains of Edom sink beneath the surface, and is retained underground by the rocky bottom; so that a supply of water can almost always be obtained by digging pits in the sand.

The narrative also claims that Elisha prophesied a decisive defeat against the Moabites. The water in the trenches appeared

7.1 Kings 3:11-20
8. Strachan, Hastings Bible Dictionary Vol. 1 page 695
as blood to the Moabites; they thought that the three Kings were in war with each other; Mesha attempted to attack them while they were in "disorder". But when the Moabites attacked the three Kings they arose and inflicted a severe defeat upon the Moabites and devastated their country. How Elisha knew about the phenomenon of the water or how it so happened that his prophecy was so completely fulfilled remains to be answered.

The Syrians Entrapped

Ben-hadad the King of Syria had probably been conducting several irregular campaigns against Samaria. We have no historical records of these invasions except that which we gather in the cycles of narratives about Elisha. The narrative in 11 Kings 6:8-23 states that the King of Syria found so many of his confidential plans so often anticipated by the enemy, Israel, that he began suspecting his own officers of treachery. But he was informed that it was Elisha, whose supernatural knowledge was placed at the disposal of the King of Israel. On several occasions Elisha warned Joram where the enemy would attack.

The King of Syria sent a group of soldiers to a village named Dotham to capture Elisha, but Elisha prayed that the Syrians be stricken with blindness; after his prayer was answered he led them into Samaria where their sight was restored to them. The King would have destroyed them but Elisha enjoined him to feed them and send them back to their master; as a consequence, the
marauding expeditions against Israel were discontinued. Only a few scholars accept this account as authentic; but the story does suggest that Syria made several campaigns against Israel before the attempted siege was made by Ben-hadad some time later. The story also indicates that the prophet was a frequent advisor of the King.

The Syrian Siege of Samaria 11 Kings 6:24 - 7:20

The account of the siege of Samaria follows the traditional account of the Syrian invasion upon Israel. The narrative seems to be of a different author from the preceding narratives and of a higher literary quality. Wellhausen, Driver and many others assign this narrative to a document of the same character as 1 Kings 20,22; while Kuenen, Kittel and Benzinger are of the opinion that this is a pure, simple Elisha narrative.

It is not definitely known whether the siege of Samaria occurred during the reign of Joram or under some later King. But according to the chronological reference given in the Abingdom Bible, we may assume that most scholars think that the siege took place during the reign of Joram.

The narrative states that the King of Syria gathered a great army to besiege Samaria. The King wanted to surrender the city but Elisha encouraged Israel to defend the city until the last. The Syrians were not so successful in attacking the city, but they encamped around the city and caused a famine and panic within its

11. Leslie, E. A. Abingdom Bible Commentary Page 110
walls. The situation became so tense that the King in utter despair sought the counsel of Elisha. Elisha prophesied "tomorrow at this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria". During the night there was a panic among the Syrian hosts: the camp was deserted and every part of the prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled. Most critics agree that probably the Syrians left the camp in haste because they thought that a mighty host was advancing from the North to the relief of the city.

Elisha Anoints Hazael of Syria

Elisha had done many favors and had rendered important services to the King of Israel and his people on many critical occasions, but there was little probability of establishing a good understanding between the prophet and Joram. Joram still tolerated Baalism, and his Mother, Jezebel still possessed great influence over the Government. Furthermore, a growing harmony between the two was hindered because of the stain of the crime of Naboth that remained against the house of Ahab. Ewald suggests that these facts caused Elisha to go to Damascus.12

While Elisha was in Damascus Ben-hadad, the king became very sick and sought the prophetical oracle of Elisha concerning whether he would live. Hastings suggests that Elisha came to Damascus at this time because he saw that this was an opportune time to carry out the command given to Elijah at Mount Sinai.

12. Ewald, History of Israel Page 92
   Skinner, New Century Bible Page 310
13. Ewald History of Israel Page 92
The King sent Hazael, his high officer in the army, with presents to Elisha asking whether he should recover. Elisha utters a misleading oracle telling Hazael to inform his master that he would recover; but at the same time he privately tells Hazael that it has been revealed to him that the King would die.

Elisha was overcome with emotion and suddenly burst into tears. On being asked to explain his emotion, the prophet disclosed his pre-vision of the crimes which Hazael would perpetrate upon Israel in the future; and when Hazael disclaims all pretensions to such eminence with ironical expression, Elisha revealed to him that he was to be the King of Syria. The story continues that Hazael delivered the false message to Ben-hadad that he was to recover; but on the next day Ben-hadad was secretly murdered and Hazael was later proclaimed King of Syria.

There is nothing in any known historical record that substantiates this story except the mentioning of the name of Hazael as King of Damascus (842 and 839 B.C.) in an inscription of Shalmaneser III. Nothing else is known of him except that which is gathered from the narrative in 11 Kings 8. There has been no record preserved of his having been actually annointed either by Elisha or by Elijah. The story only says that Elisha told him that he was to be King. However, many of the scholars of the Old Testament ascribe this incident as the anointing of Jehu.

Elisha Anoints Jehu 11 Kings 9:1-13

Elisha had one more assigned task to accomplish and that was to anoint Jehu as King of Israel. This was the final act in carry-
ing out the avenge upon the house of Ahab for the crimes and evil acts it was noted for. During a war between Israel and Syria for the possession of Ramoth-Gilead, Joram was so wounded that he was compelled to leave the siege in the charge of his army captain, Jehu, and return to Samaria to recover. His ally, Jehosaphat the King of Judah, left the the battle and went to visit him. During their absence Elisha sent a son of the prophets to Ramoth-Gilead to seek out Jehu and anoint him King. As soon as Jehu divulged the secret to his brother officer, they proclaimed him King and the entire army espoused his cause. Jehu began his wholesale murders on the house of Ahab and all Baal worshipers. The nation had long been ready for a change and the house of Omri fell without being able to strike a blow in self defense.\(^5\)

**The Closing Years**

Elisha must have lived until an extreme old age, but probably remained active until death. It seems clear that there has been much of his life activity omitted in the present form of the narratives. For over forty-five years he was the great religious force and watchman of Jahweh in Israel. Many times the kingdom was on the verge of destruction at the hands of the Syrians during the reigns of Jehu, but probably by the counsel of Elisha and by other forces this calamity was averted. But at last a better day dawned just before Elisha's life became extinct.

15. Hastings' Bible Dictionary  Vol. 1 Page 697
CHAPTER IV
THE MIRACLES OF ELISHA

The question of miracles has already been treated in previous discussions with reference to the Elisha narratives as well as the Elijah narratives. There are many narratives in the Second Book of the Kings that revolve solely around the illustration of his wonderful career as a prophet of miracles. These narratives seem to have come from various original sources, some older and some more recent; yet, they constitute in every respect an unmistakable unity. Several critics, as Wellhausen, Ewald, Strachan, and others are of the opinion that these different narratives were probably recorded in a special work before they were compiled or incorporated in the Book of Kings. 16

Most of the miracles are centered around individual incidents and the private life of Elisha; his miracles were performed not so much for the nation, but for helpless individuals. These miracles coming from several sources of early and later dates, are found to be quite varied in their nature and types of miracles. Like the Elijah narratives, many of them probably are merely legendary tales, while some of them may be centered around historical facts and could be classed as "relative" miracles. Ewald and several other Old Testament critics are of the opinion that all of these miracles are either myths or

misinterpreted incidents that were in reality the result of natural causes. It is quite evident that some of the critics such as Skinner seem to admit that some of Elijah's miracles were real miracles but cast a grave doubt as to whether any of the Elisha miracles are "real" miracles. On the other hand it seems that if we are to admit that real miracles occurred during the ministry of Elijah, there is no reason why we should not ascribe real miracles to Elisha of the same age and environment. An enlightening statement is given by Hastings on the presence of miracles in the stages of Hebrew history which have always been centered around religious issues; "The province of religion is naturally always the province of miracles also, because it is that of pure and strong faith in the presence and operation of heavenly forces in human experience; where, therefore, true religion makes the most powerful efforts, there will be a corresponding display of miracles which will either actually take place through the activity of the believing spirit or will be at any rate experienced by the believing heart; while to be powerfully moved, though only from a distance, by the might of such forces, is in itself a gain."

**Healing of the Waters 11 Kings 2:19-22**

The miracle of Elisha after he had returned from the scene of the translation of Elijah, occurred in the city of Jericho. It is said that the inhabitants of the town requested Elisha

18."Greater Men and Women of the Bible" Vol 3 Page 425
to purify the water of the city which flowed from a spring and had become polluted. Elisha called for a new cruse and a supply of salt; he cast the salt into the spring probably as a symbol of purification and preservation and declared that God had "healed" the water.

Most critics agree that this passage was originally a local tradition in Jericho to the effect that the principal fountain of Jericho owed its salubrious qualities to a miracle performed on its by Elisha. The term "unto this day" is sufficient evidence to indicate that the narrative was written some time after the event. A spring there called "Ain-es-sultan" is sometimes called the "Fountain of Elisha" and is no doubt the source of this tradition.

Elisha and the Children of Bethel 11 Kings 2:23-25

The narrative states that while Elisha was passing through Bethel on his homeward journey, he was insulted by a crowd of little children who mocked the prophet calling him "bald head".

Elisha looked back at them and cursed them in the name of Jahweh; two she bears came out of the woods and rent them to pieces.

The narrative is exceedingly brief and may have been remodelled by the editor. This would account for many needed details which might relieve the difficulty and modify the apparent disproportion between the wrong done and the penalty inflicted.

20. Ewald, History of Israel Page 85
22. Hastings, J. Great Men and Women of the Bible Page 427
But on the other hand, it is well to remember that this legend comes from a period in which the unethical sense of this story would likely be overlooked or inoffensive to religious minds of that day. In its present form, the story reads like a folklore tale that is familiar in all lands; it was probably intended for the admonition of rude and naughty children, and to enforce the lesson of respect for the office and person of the prophet.

Replenishing of Widow's Oil 11 Kings 4:1-7

Many of the Elisha miracles seem to have no special purpose at all; they are simply performed for the relief of trivial and transient distresses. The narrative gives an account of Elisha aiding the widow of one of the sons of the prophets. Her sons were about to be seized by one of her creditors and be sold as slaves; she appealed to Elisha for aid. The prophet commanded her to borrow from her neighbors all the vessels she could and fill them with oil from the small amount she had in her household flask. As an act of faith she did as she was commanded and found that the small amount of oil in her flask miraculously increased and filled every vessel she could obtain. Elisha directed her to sell the oil, which brought money enough to pay her debt and something over to maintain her family. The language shows a slight trace of local dialect, such as is found elsewhere in the Elisha stories. This narrative is quite similar.

to the story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath.

The Shunammite Woman and Her Son 11 Kings 4:8-37

Elisha on his frequent visits passing through Shunem was entertained by a wealthy lady, who finally persuaded her husband to build a guest chamber for this holy man. As a reward of her hospitality Elisha promised that a son would be born to her the following year. She had no son and her husband was old; but like John the Baptist and Isaac, the child was born beyond all human probability. In course of time the child grew up, and one day was seized by sun-stroke in the harvest field and died that same day. The Mother sought the aid of Elisha who was at Mount Carmel. Elisha first sent his staff with his servant Gehazi to lay on the face of the child; but when this proved unavailing he came himself and through prayer restored the dead child to life.

This story is parallel to the story in 1 Kings 17:17-24 it illustrates the blessings that are rewards for reverence shown a prophet of Jahweh. The story may also have been found to show that Elisha has as much power as Elijah in restoring the dead to life. Many scholars think that the story was based on the story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath. 23a

Purifies the Poison Food 11 Kings 4:35-41

The next miracle in the narrative took place probably during the seven years famine. Elisha had called together the

sons of the prophets to a common meal and it was discovered that some poisonous wild fruit had been thrown into the pot through mistake. Elisha made the dish pure and harmless by casting a dish of meal into the pot. This story seems to be another crude attempt to illustrate the power of Elisha. It is doubtful whether it is even based upon any historical fact.

Feeding of a Hundred Prophets 11 Kings 4:42-44

 Apparently during the same famine while Elisha was in Gilgal, he was visited by a farmer from Baal-Shalishah who brought him twenty loaves of barley and a sack of fresh ears of corn. Elisha commanded his servant to feed a hundred men with this small amount of food. The narrative implies that the food was miraculously increased and that there was much left over. Hastings suggests that this was an anecdote teaching that Jahweh could send unexpected provision for his servants.24

The story contains a remarkable resemblance to the miracle performed by Christ when he fed the 5000 with a small amount of fish. But Edersheim is of the opinion that the text does not necessarily indicate such a miraculous increase of food as does the Christ miracle.25 The narrative has probably been shortened and condensed; it is not improbable that a similar event actually occurred during the ministry of Elisha but we do not have enough information or material to determine the

24. "Greater Men and Women of the Bible" Vol 3 Page 426
25. Edersheim, A. History of Israel and Judah Vol. 6 Page 145
authenticity of the narrative.

**Healing of the Syrian Soldier 11 Kings 5: 1-27**

One of the best known miracles of Elisha and one that has become a classic story, is the healing of Naaman. Naaman was the general of the Syrian army and became afflicted with a severe case of leprosy. A Hebrew slave girl advised him to go to Elisha in Israel. Elisha instructed him to dip himself seven times into the river of Jordan. This, he did reluctantly, but returned and confessed belief in Jahweh after he found that he was miraculously healed. The story claims that he offered Elisha money for the deed and Elisha refused. But Gehazi, a servant of Elisha, could not resist the offer. He followed Naaman and by dint of lying he obtained the treasure which Elisha refused from the generous Syrian. But upon his return Elisha discerned his guilt and pronounced that he would become a leper as Naaman was. The narrator states that Gehazi immediately became a leper forever.

On the whole this miracle is conceded to be the most dignified miracle in the life of Elisha. The miraculous character of Naaman's cure exposes it in some degree to the objection taken to these narratives as being too thaumaturgic. Kittel states that the narrative is "thoroughly in keeping with the state of things in the time of Elisha"\(^{26}\) Many moral lessons may be obtained from the story; it is used extensively in homil-
The Axe-head Made to Swim: 11 Kings 6:1-7

The sons of the prophets were cutting down trees to build them a larger dwelling place. One of them lost the head of his axe (which he had borrowed) in river of Jordan. The narrative states that Elisha "cut down a stick, and cast it in thither, and made the iron to swim."

There have been numerous arguments - many of them ridiculous - advanced in attempting to present a natural explanation for this insignificant incident. Some of the Rabbis and certain modern scholars as Ewald argued that the stick was cut to fit the head of the axe and so brought up to the surface, or else that the stick thrust under the axe had rendered it possible to drag it to the bank. But these explanations are quite absurd. The narrative does not directly indicate that the incident was a narrative; but it seems quite clear that the author of the Books of Kings understood the incident as of miraculous nature, otherwise he would not have inserted such a significant event in the "wonders" of Elisha.

The Miracle of the Bones of Elisha: 11 Kings 13:20-21

Probably the most marvelous of the Elisha miracles is the miracle that illustrates that the wonder working power of Elisha

27. Ewald, History of Israel Vol 4 Page 86
was not terminated at death. It was reported that on one occasion a dead body was flung into his tomb on the approach of a band of marauders and that the dead body was restored to life. There is no other miracle in the entire Bible which is exactly like this peculiar miracle. It is quite apparent that this simple folklore tale was of late origin; yet crude and impossible as it seems to us it produced a great effect upon the Jews; so much so that it became the chief title of Elisha's distinction among the prophets; "After his death his body prophesied"—that was the crowning glory of his life in the early Jewish school.

The Work of Elisha

It is commonly accepted that the work of Elisha was quite inferior to the work of Elijah. But it should be considered that the work of Elisha could have been much more and probably greater than that presented in the narratives. It is quite evident that the compiler of the Book of Kings exerted every effort in attempting to illustrate that Elisha was a great prophet. But despite the many wonder stories and the patriotic deeds of Elisha, there is not enough concerning his activity to make him a great prophet under the test of modern criticism. With all other prophets the primary function is spiritual teaching; miracles are only accessories in that teaching. But with Elisha miracles seem to be the principal function and the teaching is subsidiary. 29

29 Smith, W. R. Ency. Britannica Vol. 9 Page 280
On the other hand, more consideration towards the evaluation of the life of Elisha than is given by most critics of the Old Testament. It is generally conceded that the narratives in their present form, which is sometimes rather crude, fail under the test of modern criticism to portray the prophet Elisha as great a man as they probably purposed to do. There are three theories concerning the motives or methods used in compiling the narratives: (1), a few of the older scholars believe that some of the narratives are original records of historical events; (2), the majority of critics are of the opinion that most of the stories were originally traditional stories that were later compiled and edited in their present form; (3), another view is that some of the narratives were historical records that were augmented by later writers and editors; (4), some such stories as the cursing of the children, the swimming of the axe-head, the miracle of the bones of Elisha's bones as legends that were told with the intent of glorifying the life of Elisha. Even in granting these theories to be true, we should consider that there must have been deeper reasons that caused the people of that day to make such attempts at portraying the life of Elisha as are manifested in the narratives. There must have been something extraordinary about the life and activity of Elisha that warranted such praise and adoration from his fellow-men even long after his death.
The true evaluation of Elisha should be based upon the total impression of his personality rather than upon the deeds that are attributed to him by the narratives. Elisha was a prophet "of the people", of public life. Thus, it is not unusual that such a man as Elisha so loved by the people should have many deeds ascribed to him after his death which he never performed. While, on the other hand, a man who served as a public servant to his fellowmen and country in the days of Elisha as long as he did, many of his great deeds were probably never recorded.

Elisha contributed to the progress of the prophetic guilds. He began his active ministry by helping these prophetic guilds and continued to succour them throughout his life. Several of the narratives suggest that his relationships with them were intimate and continuous. He healed the waters for them at Jericho (II Kings 2:19ff). He encouraged them in enlarging their premises (II Kings 6:1-7). It was for the widow of a prophet that he multiplied the oil. It was a member of the prophetic guild that he assigned to fulfill the task of anointing Jehu as King (II King 9:4). These, and other incidents, are quite convincing that Elisha was one of the outstanding figures in maintaining and promoting prophetic activities.

Elisha was a politician, statesman and friend of the Kings. He was no mere courtier but he stood near the Kings of his people as lover of the people. He was constantly available for consultation and advice to the King in national crises. The Narratives show how
he more than once saved Israel from the destruction of the enemy.
The last pictured scene in his career is that of the prophet and a King of Israel - Joash (II Kings 13:14-19); here the prophet in his last moment is still eager to do something for his country.

Elisha was undoubtedly a friend of the people. Most of his deeds were deeds of mercy and help. He befriended the poor, blessed the food of the needy, purified it from poison and added to the meagre amount in store. The stories of Shunem reveal his friendliness homely interest. One writer states that crowning all of his ministry of compassion is the incident of his treatment of the blinded Syrian captives. Jehon, the King of Israel, asked, "My father, shall I smite them?" Elisha answered, "Thou shall not smite them ..."

Elisha is revealed as a patient, earnest worker in social reform, speaking and acting for political freedom and popular rights, a comforter in sorrow, a comrade in the days of trouble. Thus, here in the life of Elisha and Elijah we find unique and contrasted personalities, two men who made distinct contributions to their country and to the development of the Hebrew religion. Elijah made his contribution chiefly through deeds, while Elisha made his through his personality. On the surface it may appear that of the two Elijah was by far the greater, which may be true; but the following statement made by H. P. Stansley sheds an illuminating light upon
the value of the contribution of Elisha to his fellowmen and
to the Hebrew Religion as compared with that of Elijah. "The
work of great ones of this earth is carried on by far inferior
instruments, but on a far wider scale, and it may be a far
wider spirit that was begun in fire and storm, in solitude and
awful visions, must be carried on through winning arts, and heal-
ing acts, and gentle words of peaceful and social intercourse, not
in the desert of Horeb or on the top of Carmel but in the crowded
thoroughfares of Samaria" - H. P. Stanly (Study Bible p.66).
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A survey of the Elijah and Elisha narratives reveal that the narratives as a whole strengthen our impression of the merely mechanical character of the redaction by which they are rather loosely united. There does not seem to be any attempt to work the material into a history in our sense of the word. Many of the narratives were anecdotes of varied periods and types. The narratives are pieced together without any chronological sequence and often without any reference to the date at all.

Despite the inaccuracy and the various discrepancies in these narratives, they are to be considered as being of historical value. These narratives are not pure history, but they are the essences of history. They are mostly based upon historic facts, but are given a religious significance. Many of these narratives are of legendary character but as Gunkel suggests, even these have their historical value. These narratives furnish us information concerning important stages of history, the social condition of that time, and other details that are lacking in the extra-Biblical materials that we now have.

These narratives are significant because of the illuminating biography that they present concerning two of the most prominent and significant personages in the history of the Hebrew people. These narratives preserve the only comprehensive records that we have of the lives and activity of Elijah and Elisha; the destiny
of Jahweh religion among the Hebrew people seemed to have been determined by the works of these two great champions of Jahweh.

If the life and deeds of these great men, as presented to us in their present form in the narratives, were subjected to the severe test of modern criticism, their contribution would be rather limited. This is especially true in the case of the life of Elisha. But we must be continually reminded that it is quite probable that the present sources and materials concerning their life and activity that we now possess, give only a partial record of their life and deeds. Thus, it is quite probable that Elijah and Elisha were even still more significant, and greater men than the present materials portray them. While on the other hand it is also possible that they were not as significant as the narratives attempt to portray them. However, there are two significant conclusions that we may draw concerning the work of these great prophets; during the period of their activity, Baalism was almost completely and permanently extirpated from the Kingdom of Israel; and secondly, forever afterwards the Hebrews regarded Jahweh as the Supreme and finally the only God.

Abiding Values

These narratives contain unlimited value in presenting historical data, in portraying the social conditions of the early Hebrew periods, in presenting the biography of two of Israel's great heroes; but there is yet another value that is no less
vital than the historical values; that is the ever abiding spiritual truths that are yet illuminating where one is confronted with the perplexing problems of today.

Throughout the Elijah stories the notes of faith in God, social justice, and equal rights of man are resounded. It was not only human courage, good will and faith that gave Elijah majesty when on Mount Carmel, but it was faith in God. It was through faith that he stood silent at peace amidst the turbulence of the Baal prophets and when he calmly knelt and prayed that God should manifest himself through fire from heaven. Still greater lessons of moral teachings may be obtained through reading the dramatic incidents that occurred upon Mount Horeb. This narrative is claimed by many to be spiritually one of the most profound passages in the Old Testament. It seems that God teaches Elijah that after all, the greater things are not always done by force. The manifestations suggest that the storm clouds do their work; earthquakes and fire have their mission, in the progress of the universe, but the answer to the question of the spirit of man is not found in those but in the "small still voice" - the quiet of inward life, God's forgiving mercy and solaceing love. Even the passing away of Elisha has a potential spiritual value. Innumerable souls who neared the end of the journey of life and confronted the dreaded thoughts of death were spiritually comforted and cherished in the thought that they, too, like Elijah would be rescued from the chills of death by the
great heavenly "chariot of fire".

The Elisha narratives are also enriched with spiritual values, yet they are not as abundant, nor are they of as high a spiritual level as those in the Elijah narratives. One admires the faith and spirit that is manifested by Elisha when he quit the plow, left his parents, his home and all his possessions to follow the homeless wanderer - Elijah - in the service of Jahweh. Again, one is compelled to sense the power of prayer as illustrated in the story where the prophet, Elisha, restores the life of the Shunammite child. After earnest prayer the prophet stretched himself upon the little corpse until he felt the warmth of life return to its body. Hastings comments that the story speaks to us of Christ and his miracles; Elijah and Elisha raised the dead by prayer and personal contact, but Christ raised the dead by word of his power.

The story of Elisha and the Syrians at Dotham illustrates God's invisible vigilance over them that believe in Him. When Elisha heard of the approach of the Syrian army coming to seize him, he comforted his servant by saying, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The story of Naaman is considered one of the classics of the Elisha narratives. In this, and other stories, the lessons of faith, truthfulness and other spiritual values are found. These innumerable spiritual values in both the Elijah and Elisha narratives shall ever retain their prominence in the spiritual development of man.
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