

## Foreign Women Transforming Elijah into the Prophet of the Lord (1 Kgs 17–19)

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyses the different versions of the Elijah cycle (1 Kgs 17–19) as witnessed, in particular, in the Masoretic text (MT), the Codex Vaticanus (G<sup>B</sup>), the Codex Alexandrinus (G<sup>A</sup>), and the Antiochian text (G<sup>Ant.</sup>). The comparison of the manuscripts shows that the MT adds and omits certain words and expressions. The author explored whether the additions and omissions are scribal mistakes or rather an intentional redactional intervention. Arguing for the latter, the author proposes that the MT presents not only the great deeds of the great prophet Elijah but also how Elijah became such a great prophet. Based on this analysis, the author proposes five stages of Elijah's formation process: 1. the transformation of a man into a listener (1 Kgs 17:2–6); 2. Elijah's transformation into a man of God's word (the Cherith episode and the Zarephath episode in 17:7–16); 3. the transformation from a man of God's word into a man of God (the resuscitation of the dead son in 17:17–24); 4. the transformation from a man of God into a prophet (the Carmel episode 18:1–40); 5. the transformation of a zealous prophet into a man standing before the Lord (19:1–18).

**KEYWORDS:** Elijah, formation, prophet, narrative analysis, textual-criticism, 1 Kings 17–19.

It is generally agreed that the Elijah-Elisha cycle went through multiple redactions and changes over centuries, even though scholars heatedly debate and disagree on the dating of particular passages. Despite inconclusive scholarly conclusions, a consensus among scholars can be noticed. Above all, it is agreed that the Elijah-Elisha cycle sprang out of oral tradition. Relying on Alexander Rofé's revised volume<sup>1</sup> we can assume that short stories about prophets' miracles, such as those included in 2 Kgs 4, circulated independently. These originally independent stories were later turned into biographies. The final stage of this editorial process represented the insertion of parts of biographies into the Books of Kings, in particular, into the Ahab-Joash narrative (1 Kgs 16 – 2 Kgs 13). The insertion of these stories

<sup>1</sup> A. Rofé, *Storie di profeti. La narrativa sui profeti nella Bibbia Ebraica, generi letterari e storia* (Biblioteca di storia e storiografia dei tempi biblici 8; Brescia: Paideia 1991). For other studies see R. Smend, "Das Wort Jahwes an Elia," *VT* 25/3 (1975) 525–543; S. Otto, "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History," *JSOT* 27 (2003) 487–508; E. Bock, *Kings and Prophets. Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah*, 2 ed. (Edinburg: Floris Books 2006); S.L. McKenzie, "'My God Is Yhwh': The Composition of the Elijah Story in 1–2 Kings," *Congress Volume Munich 2013* (ed. C.M. Maier) (Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2014) 92–110.

into the Books of Kings, however, varies according to textual editions and manuscripts. Thus, for example, the death of Elijah is inserted in chapter 10 (*Vetus Latina*)<sup>2</sup> or chapter 13 of 2 Kgs in Hebrew. Similarly, the story of Naboth's vineyard is included in chapter 21 in Hebrew or chapter 20<sup>3</sup> of 3 Kingdoms.

Although it has been reasonably concluded that some differences among the manuscripts represent scribal mistakes, the composition of the Elijah-Elisha cycles, the wording of single passages, and the additions and omissions of some words in Greek and Hebrew add nuance to the respective textual tradition. This paper focuses on presenting Elijah in the Books of Kings and comparing different textual traditions in the Masoretic text (MT), the Codex Vaticanus (G<sup>B</sup>), the Codex Alexandrinus (G<sup>A</sup>), and the Antiochian text (G<sup>Antc</sup>). I argue that the Greek versions present Elijah's deeds in 3 Kgs 17–19 as the deeds of a great prophet who unexpectedly appeared on the stage. In contrast, the MT underlines the formation of Elijah, his development as the man of God, and finally his transition into a prophet of the Lord who stands before the Lord. Two foreign women played a crucial role in this process – the poor widow of Zarephath and the Phoenician queen Jezebel.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these reflections, I suggest that the MT version of the Elijah cycle implies that an encounter with foreigners was an inseparable part of Elijah's formation process. This conclusion has, however, wider implications. Since Elijah was considered a prototype of prophets, we can rightly conclude that the MT reworking of the Elijah cycle intended to paradigmatic phases in the formation of any prophet. Consequently, the encounter with a foreigner represents an important part of the prophetic formation. This concept is excellently expressed by Stephanie Wyatt:

Through a reframed process of comparison and contrast, the text's presentation of foreign women becomes more complex, pro-YHWH and anti-YHWH stances are muddled, and Elijah's own status as an Israelite "insider" comes under scrutiny. What is normally holy becomes strange and what is strange becomes holy.<sup>5</sup>

If we translate this proposal into narratological terms, we can suggest that Elijah represents a "round" hero, contrary to other prophets who appear as "flat" heroes in the Books of Kings, such as Nathan, Ahijah, Jehu, and Isaiah.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the character of Elijah

2 J.C. Trebolle Barrera – P. Torijano Morales – A. Piquer Otero, "The Septuagint's Faculty of Putting Things in Their Right Place: Challenges of a Critical Edition of IV Kingdoms / II Kings 10. 30–31; 13. 14–21," *New Avenues in Biblical Exegesis in Light of the Septuagint* (eds. L. Pessoa Da Silva Pinto – D. Scialabba) (The Septuagint in Its Ancient Context 1; Turnhout: Brepols 2022) 71–91.

3 D.W. Gooding, "Ahab according to the Septuagint," *ZAW* 76/3 (1964) 270; S.L. McKenzie, *1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 16* (IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2019) 179.

4 This confrontation could have symbolic meaning: "the narrative presentation of Jezebel, Elijah, and the Widow of Zarephath exemplifies Israel's struggle to define its own identity and the identity of those who it might perceive as threats to its wellbeing." S. Wyatt, "Jezebel, Elijah, and the Widow of Zarephath: A Ménage à Trois That Estranges the Holy and Makes the Holy the Strange," *JSOT* 36/4 (2012) 436.

5 Wyatt, "Jezebel," 438.

6 J.L. Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us." *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (SubBi 13; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1990) 84–85.

in the MT develops as the narrative unfolds: he passes through ups and downs, changes his relations with the king and God and his ways of speaking and acting; even his inner world changes.

## 1. Titles Given to Elijah

To achieve this goal, let us first examine the occurrences of the term “prophet” in the MT and in the Greek manuscripts. The G<sup>B,A</sup> employ the term “prophet” in v. 17:1.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Elijah, like other prophets in the Books of Kings,<sup>8</sup> enters the stage as a prophet who boldly proclaims the words of God. Therefore, I suggest that the G<sup>B,A</sup> present all the deeds of Elijah, including chapters 17–19, as those of the prophet Elijah. The goal of these chapters is to illustrate how a great prophet should speak and act.

On the contrary, the MT and the G<sup>Ant.</sup> omit the term “prophet” in 17:1, and the MT employs this term only in chapter 18. Thus, Elijah refers to himself using this term during the confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:22<sup>9</sup>) The narrator confirms Elijah’s claim to be a prophet of the Lord in his comment in 1 Kgs 18:36: “At the time of the offering of (the meal) sacrifice, Elijah, the prophet, came near and said [...]”<sup>10</sup> A comparison of the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts shows that the term “prophet” in 18:36 is present only in the MT but is missing in all other manuscripts. The omission of the term “prophet” in 17:1 and its insertion in 18:36 in the MT cannot be considered a scribal mistake but rather a deliberate choice of the scribes behind the MT. This scribal choice must have the specific goal of showing how Elijah became the prophet and what he had to go through in order to become the model prophet.<sup>11</sup>

The suggestion that the MT presents Elijah in a slightly different way is supported by another omission as well. Following the introductory title (17:1), the MT refers to Elijah exclusively using personal pronouns (17:2–7), whereas all other versions use his proper name (3 Kgs<sup>A</sup> 17:2, 5<sup>12</sup>). “Elijah” appears in the MT only in 17:8 (the widow of Zarephath episode). The importance of the proper name is emphasized by the MT addition in 17:15 (“according to the word of Elijah”) which is absent in all Greek manuscripts. The concentration of the proper name in the widow of Zarephath episode and its complete absence in the Cherith episode in the MT also suggest that this is not a simple scribal mistake but rather an intentional omission and addition.

<sup>7</sup> J.T. Dennison, “Elijah the Tishbite: A Note on I Kings 17:1,” *WTJ* 41/1 (1978) 124–126.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nathan in 1 Kgs 1:8, Ahijah in 1 Kgs 14:2, Jehu in 1 Kgs 16:7, Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22:13–28, Jonah in 2 Kgs 14:25, Isaiah in 2 Kgs 19:2.

<sup>9</sup> This reference appears in all manuscripts.

<sup>10</sup> The parts in italics are omitted in the G<sup>B,Ant,A</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Elijah was considered not only the prototype of prophets but also as the prototype of religious life. F. Ribot – R. Copey, *The Ten Books on the Way of Life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites* (Early Carmelite Spirituality 1; Faversham: Saint Albert’s Press 2005) 76–55.

<sup>12</sup> The G<sup>A</sup> omits the proper name in verse 17:5, thus confirming the wording of the MT.

Finally, an examination of chapters 17–19 shows that Elijah is also given other titles. First, in v 17:1, all the manuscripts denote him as “the Tishbite, (who was) from among the inhabitants of Gilead” (MT; cf. also G<sup>B, Ant., A</sup>). This title concerns his origin. The second title was given to Elijah by the foreign woman, who calls him “the man of God” (1 Kgs 17:18, 24). Finally, Elijah characterized himself as “the zealous (one)” who had received a special mission from the Lord (1 Kgs 19:9–18).

Considering the titles given to Elijah, as well as several studies regarding the structure of chapters 17–19,<sup>13</sup> we can point out the phases of Elijah’s formation in the MT. First, the MT narrator characterized him as “the Tishbite, (who was) from among the inhabitants of Gilead” (1 Kgs 17:1 in the MT). The woman in Zarephath characterized him as the man of God (1 Kgs 18:18, 24). Only in the confrontation with Ahab and Jezebel does Elijah become a zealous prophet whom God granted authority to transmit his prophetic power to Elisha through the ritual of anointing.

There are other indicators besides the titles that point to the process of gradual development of the hero Elijah. 1 Kgs 17–19 refers to specific geography since it describes a unique location (Zarephath in 1 Kgs 17:9–10). Some general references are also included in other parts of 1–2 Kgs (Sidon, Samaria, Jezreel, Carmel, Horeb, etc.).<sup>14</sup> The scribes allow Elijah to move from one place to the other, presenting him as an itinerant prophet. His movements are often charged with specific meaning, particularly when Elijah stops moving (1 Kgs 17:5, 10) or starts to move vertically (1 Kgs 17:19, 23; 18:20, 42; 19:9). The change in Elijah’s movements underlines the importance of the given passage. Indeed, I argue that the changes in Elijah’s movements correspond to the crucial moments in his formation.<sup>15</sup>

Putting all these elements together, I propose five transformative moments of the hero Elijah in the MT:

1. the transformation of a man into a listener (17:2–6);
2. Elijah’s transformation into a man of God’s word (the Cherith episode and the Zarephath episode in 17:7–16);
3. the transformation of a man of God’s word into a man of God (the resuscitation of the dead son in 17:17–24);
4. the transformation of a man of God into a prophet (the Carmel episode 18:1–40);
5. the transformation of a zealous prophet into a man who stands before the Lord (19:1–18).

13 See for example J.T. Walsh – D.W. Cotter, *1 Kings* (Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1996) 225–289.

14 For more details, see E.A. Knauf, *1 Könige 15–22* (HtHKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2019) 181–182.

15 For a similar endeavor from the psychological viewpoint, see A. Wiener, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism. A Depth-Psychological Study* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; London – Boston, MA: Routledge & Paul 1978). For a literary standpoint, see R.L. Heller, *The Characters of Elijah and Elisha and the Deuteronomic Evaluation of Prophecy. Miracles and Manipulation* (LHBOTS 671; London – New Delhi: Bloomsbury 2018).

An attentive reading of chapters 1 Kgs 17–19 shows that two foreign women, the poor widow of Zarephath and Queen Jezebel, played a crucial role in Elijah's transformative process. I will focus on the role of these two women in Elijah's transformation.

## 2. A Man Who Listens

Most scholars agree on the division of chapter 17 into three episodes: I. the Cherith episode (1 Kgs 17:2–6), transition (17:7), II. the widow of Zarephath episode (17:8–16), and III. the resuscitation of the dead son (17:17–24).<sup>16</sup> While the first two episodes are closely related, both linguistically and structurally (see below), the third one features several new elements.<sup>17</sup> The division of the chapter into three parts is also supported by the analysis of Elijah's movements, which are correlated with the main theme of the passages. Elijah first travels to the brook of Cherith, where he stops and dwells, which signals that the reader should pay particular attention to what Elijah learned in solitude.

As noted above, the MT avoids using the proper name "Elijah" in 17:2–6, while the Greek manuscripts do use it. The MT inserts the proper name "Elijah" three times in 17:7–16. The choice of the MT scribes to omit the proper name in the first episode and to multiply it in the second episode is not reflected in the Greek texts that use the proper name in both episodes. The omission of the proper name in the first episode can be considered a scribal mistake but it also may point to the scribes' intention not to use the proper name in the first episode. If this hypothesis is correct, then it can be suggested that the first phase of Elijah's formation transformed him into a man whose theophoric name assumes its full meaning אֱלִיָּהוּ during the second episode.<sup>18</sup>

While dwelling at the brook of Cherith, Elijah received commands directly from God (1 Kgs 17:2–6). The episode is presented in the literary form: command<sup>19</sup> – execution<sup>20</sup> – fulfilment.<sup>21</sup> The narrators report only the speeches made by God. Elijah neither responds

<sup>16</sup> S.J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 2 ed. (WBC 12; Nashville, TN: Nelson 2003) 215; Knauf, *1 Könige 15–22*, 181.

<sup>17</sup> E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige. 1. Kön. 17 – 2. Kön. 25* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1984) II, 398.

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of the theophoric names see J.D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew. A Comparative Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic 1988); T.R. Moore, "Any as an Element in Theophoric Names," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 33 (1996) 139–152; H. Haber, "Theophoric Names in the Bible," *JBQ* 29/1 (2001) 56–59; B.A. Mastin, "The Theophoric Elements Yw and Yhw in Proper Names in Eight-Century Hebrew Inscriptions and the Proper Names at Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *ZAH* 17 (2004) 109–135; K. van der Toorn, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms: Kinship Terms as Theophoric Elements in Hebrew Names," *ZAW* 108/1 (2009) 1–11.

<sup>19</sup> "The word came to him saying: <sup>3</sup>Go from here and you should turn eastward, hide yourself in the wadi Cherit, which is opposite the Jordan, <sup>4</sup>and you will be drinking from the wadi, and as for the ravens I have commanded (them) to feed you there." (1 Kgs 17:2–3).

<sup>20</sup> "He went and did according to the word of the Lord. He indeed went and dwelled in the wadi Cherit, which is opposite the Jordan." (1 Kgs 17:5).

<sup>21</sup> "And as for the ravens, (they) were bringing him food and meat in the morning and food and meat in the evening and he kept drinking from the wadi." (1 Kgs 17:6).

nor objects to God's commands but does as he is told. Thanks to his complete submission to God's word, Elijah experienced God's supreme power over nature. Multiple intertextual links add another interpretative layer to this episode. To be nourished by God echoes God's taking care of Jacob's family (the *pilpel* form of כָּל occurs in Gen 45:11) and the miracles God performed for the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert (Exod 16); to go towards the east reminds us of the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 4:29–34), while the ravens are a sign of beauty and hope (Gen 8:6–7; Song 5:11; Job 38:39–41).

In sum, the first episode represents a passive phase of Elijah's formation in which he is asked to listen to and obey the word of God. The importance of the passive phase is underlined by his horizontal movement to a place of repose at the brook of Cherith. The intertextual links interwoven into the description of the command-fulfilment model suggest that Elijah went through the same kinds of formative experiences as the early Israelites.

### 3. Elijah, a Man of God's Word

Moving from one place to another signals a shift in the narrative. The movements of the second episode copy those of the first episode. After receiving the command from the Lord, Elijah moves horizontally – from Cherith to Zarephath – and then stops there. The similarity implies that the first and the second episodes are analogous. This proposal can be further confirmed by the analysis of the content of these passages.

The second scene introduces the crisis that challenges both God and Elijah. Verse 17:7 challenges God's promise since there was no longer water in the brook of Cherith despite God's promise that water would be provided for Elijah. However, the lack of water was due to Elijah's oath: "By the life of the Lord, God of Israel, before whom I stand, [I swear that,] if there is any dew or rain these years except by my word[, may I be cursed]." (17:1).<sup>22</sup> If there had been any rain or dew to replenish the brook, then Elijah would have died as a consequence of his oath. Here, two words of God collide: the word of God uttered through Elijah in his oath (17:1) and God's promise given to Elijah (17:2–3).

God's solution to this crisis<sup>23</sup> causes a new crisis in Elijah's principles. He had to go the land of Sidonians, from which his archenemy Jezebel came (1 Kgs 16:31). As a man who had learned to listen to God at the brook of Cherith, Elijah obeys as he had in the first episode. Elijah's obedience is expressed narratively by repeating the vocabulary of the first episode (in italics).

22 The translation of the oath formula is based on B. Conklin, *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew* (LSAWS 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2011) 39–40.

23 "8And the *word* of the Lord came to Elijah *saying*: "9Arise and go to Zarephath *that belongs to Sidon and dwell there*. Behold I have commanded there a woman, a widow, to feed you." (1 Kgs 17:8–9).

	1 Kgs 17:2–6	1 Kgs 17:7–10
Transition		<sup>7</sup> Indeed at the end of (some) days the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.
Introductory formula	<sup>2</sup> <i>The word came to him saying:</i>	<sup>8</sup> And <i>the word of the Lord came to Elijah saying:</i>
Command: - place - way of living there - sustenance	<sup>3</sup> <i>Go</i> from here and you should turn eastward, hide yourself in the wadi Cherit, which is opposite the Jordan, <sup>4</sup> and you will be drinking from the wadi, and as for the ravens <i>I have commanded</i> (them) <i>to feed you</i> there.”	<sup>9</sup> Arise and go to Zarephath that belongs to Sidon and dwell there.  Behold <i>I have commanded</i> there a woman, a widow, <i>to feed you.</i> ”
Execution	<sup>5</sup> He <i>went</i> and did according to the word of the Lord. He indeed <i>went</i> and dwelled in the wadi Cherit, which is opposite the Jordan.	<sup>10</sup> Then he arose and <i>went</i> to Zarephath and came to the gateway of the city
Fulfilment	<sup>6</sup> And as for the ravens, (they) were bringing him food and meat in the morning and food and meat in the evening and he kept drinking from the wadi.	and behold there was a woman, a widow, gathering wood.

The table demonstrates that the command-execution-fulfilment pattern in 1 Kgs 17:7–10 follows the Cherith model (1 Kgs 17:2–6). However, the subject uttering the direct speech and the subject receiving the command changed (God–Elijah; Elijah–widow). This shift indicates that Elijah transitions from the passive phase to the active one as he now gives orders to the widow. Hence, a substantial change in the formation of Elijah as a man of God’s word takes place in his encounter with the poor widow of Zarephath. The way Elijah addresses the woman echoes the way God addressed Elijah. Elijah puts into practice what he had learned from God at the brook of Cherith. He gives commands twice to the widow, just as God did to him,<sup>24</sup> and the foreign widow acts as Elijah acted. This seems to resolve the crisis presented in v. 7 since the water promised by God will be provided by the widow.

A new element of the crisis is introduced by the widow’s reply. While the first part of God’s promise is fulfilled, the second part poses another difficulty. The widow can provide

24 “First command: And he called to her and said: ‘Please bring me a little water in a vessel so I can drink.’” (1 Kgs 17:10b).

“Second command: and he called to her and said: ‘Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’” (1 Kgs 17:11b).

water, but she cannot provide the food promised by God. To make it clear, she recurs to an oath similar to Elijah's in 17:1.

Elijah's oath (1 Kgs 17:1)	Widow's oath (1 Kgs 17:12a)
<sup>1</sup> Elijah, the Tishbite, (who was) from among the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab:	<sup>12</sup> Then she said:
"By the life of the Lord, God of Israel, before whom I stand,	"By the life of the Lord, your God,
[I swear that,]	[I swear that,]
if there is any dew or rain these years except by my word	if I have anything baked, except of a handful of flour in the jar and a little oil in the flask
[, may I be cursed]."	[, may I be cursed]."

Thus, the widow disputes Elijah's command, and consequently God's promise, not because of a lack of good will but because of the oath that Elijah made in 17:1. The drought has left her with practically nothing to eat. Now two oaths conflict, and consequently, God's promise is undermined.

The widow's oath forces Elijah to employ another type of prophetic speech that he had not used before. He pronounces an oracle, as other prophets had done in the Books of Kings.<sup>25</sup> This authoritative speech counters the widow's oath and becomes an inseparable part of Elijah's speeches later on (1 Kgs 21:19; 2 Kgs 1:4, 6, 16). Following the crisis introduced into the narrative by the widow's oath, the tension is resolved by a type of prophetic speech that is new for Elijah. Only then does the narrative return to the command-execution-fulfilment pattern.

In sum, Elijah's encounter with the foreign widow, the woman from the Sidon region that the narrator condemned in 1 Kgs 16:31, forces Elijah to transition from the passive to the active phase and thus to apply what he had learned in solitude with God at the brook Cherith. However, the widow's oath triggers a new dynamic that urges Elijah to employ a new type of speech: a speech pattern that was typical for prophets in the Books of Kings, i.e. the oracle "Thus said the Lord." This type of oracle speech becomes an inseparable part of Elijah's later prophecies. In other words, it was thanks to Elijah's encounter with the foreign woman that Elijah was able to become the man of God's word.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:31; 12:24; 14:7), a man of God from Judah (1 Kgs 13:2, 21), a prophet (1 Kgs 20:13, 14, 42), Zedekiah (1 Kgs 22:11), Elisha (2 Kgs 2:21; 3:16–17; 4:43; 7:1; 9:3), Elisha's disciple (2 Kgs 9:6, 12), Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:6, 20, 32; 20:1, 5), prophets in general (2 Kgs 21:12), Hulda (2 Kgs 22:15–18).

#### 4. Elijah the Man of God

After arriving at Zarephath, Elijah stops moving horizontally. In the third episode, Elijah ascends and descends (1 Kgs 17:19, 23). The shift from horizontal to vertical movement symbolizes a new phase in Elijah's development.

The importance of this moment in Elijah's life is further evidenced by a new title that the widow gives to him – the man of God (1 Kgs 17:18 and 24). While this title is used as a synonym for the term prophet and seer in 1 Samuel 9, the MT version of the Books of Kings gives it a specific nuance. Before Elijah, this title was reserved for the southerners called by God for a specific mission.<sup>26</sup> After Elijah, "man of God" is attributed exclusively to Elisha and becomes his title par excellence.<sup>27</sup> The specific use of this title in the MT version of the Book of Kings suggests that this title is particularly linked with the miraculous activities of Elisha and with the southern tradition. The attribution of this title to Elijah confirms this pattern. Elijah becomes a miracle worker like Elisha.<sup>28</sup> In sum, the last episode (1 Kgs 17:17–24) describes how the foreign woman challenged Elijah – the man of God's word – and how Elijah assumes a new title – the man of God.

From the historical-critical viewpoint, this episode was originally separate from scenes I and II (1 Kgs 17:2–16);<sup>29</sup> however, the redactors who edited the Elijah cycle created several narrative links that connect the woman in 1 Kgs 17:17 with the widow of Zarephath.<sup>30</sup> The widow caused the transition of Elijah from "the man of God's word" to "the man of God." Although the woman called Elijah the man of God when addressing him, she accused him of causing the death of her son. At the end of the story, the woman reaffirmed that Elijah was indeed the man of God because he had raised her son from the dead. In order to perform this miracle, Elijah had to change radically his words and gestures. This shift is signalled by the change in the direction of Elijah's movements. Elijah stopped moving horizontally and started moving vertically, into the upper room (17:19). In other words, in order to reach this new phase of relationship with God, Elijah has to ascend. Moreover, Elijah stops speaking to people and starts to speak with God for the first time. Elijah no longer uses command-like speech or oracle-like prophecies – his speech becomes a prayer.

26 Thus, Shamaiah in 1 Kgs 12:22 and the man of God from Judah in 1 Kgs 13 and in 2 Kgs 23:16–17.

27 It appears nine times in 2 Kgs 4, four times in each chapter of 2 Kgs 5–8, and once in 2 Kgs 13.

28 Fire miracles attributed to Elijah the man of God are described in 2 Kgs 1:9–17. For further study on this topic, see P. Dubovský, "From Miracle-Makers Elijah and Elisha to Jesus and Apocrypha," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 12/1 (2020) 24–42. For a summary of mutual dependence between 1 Kgs 17:17–24 and 2 Kgs 4:8–37, see W. Thiel, *Könige. I. Könige 17–22* (BKAT 9/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2000) 67–71.

29 Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 397–403.

30 Both are called "woman" without a proper name (17:9 and 17) and both were widows (17:9 and 20). Moreover, both women had one son (17:14 and 17), both had a house (17:15 and 21), and both spoke frankly with Elijah. This proposal is echoed also in some commentaries that proposed to link the second and the third episode together; cf. J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark 1951) 295–296.

Finally, even though he has been exclusively a man of God's word, Elijah now adds gestures to his words.

The focus of this passage on Elijah's prayer and gestures is underlined by the concentric structure of the passage:

<sup>17</sup>And it happened after these things the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. Indeed, his illness became very severe to the point that no breath was left in him.

<sup>18</sup>Then she said to Elijah: "What to me and to you, O man of God? Have you come in to me to remind (me) my guilt and to put my son to death?"

<sup>19</sup>Then he said to her: "Give me your son!"

And he took him from her bosom

and brought him up into the upper room in which he was staying  
and laid him on his bed.

<sup>20</sup>Then he called to the Lord and said: "O Lord, my God, have you brought evil even upon the widow with whom I am lodging (by) putting her son to death?" <sup>21</sup>Then he stretched himself out upon the child three times and called to the Lord and said: "O Lord, my God, may the soul of this child return upon his inward part." <sup>22</sup>And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah and the soul of the child returned upon his inward part and he revived.

<sup>23</sup>Then Elijah took the child

and he brought him down from the upper room into the house  
and gave him to his mother.

And Elijah said: "See, your son is alive."

<sup>24</sup>And the woman said to Elijah: "Now this I know, that you are a man of God and (that) the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

The central part of the passage (17:20–22) focuses on Elijah's double prayer that frames his gesture. The first prayer echoes the widow's accusation, and the second presents Elijah's supplication. The passage concludes with the execution formula that repeats verbatim the expressions of Elijah's prayer.<sup>31</sup> This repetition suggests that now it is God who listens and does word by word what Elijah has asked for.

In sum, Elijah's second transformation was caused by his encounter with a foreign woman who should be interpreted as the widow of Zarephath according to the MT. Elijah the man of God is no longer exclusively a man of God's word but also one of prayer and action. Elijah's transformation is depicted through the shift in his movements (from horizontal to vertical), in his way of speaking (from addressing people to beseeching God), and in his gestures (from no gestures to complex ritual and symbolic gestures). These three aspects define how a man of God's word could become a man of God according to the MT editors.

<sup>31</sup> The repeated parts are in italics: "<sup>21</sup>[...] 'O Lord, my God, may *the soul of this child return upon his inward part*.'"

<sup>22</sup>And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah and *the soul of the child returned upon his inward part* and he revived."

## 5. Elijah the Prophet

Chapter 18 presents a further step in Elijah's formation. As mentioned above, only in this chapter of the MT does Elijah speak of himself as a "prophet"—a prophet belonging to the Lord (18:22).<sup>32</sup> The narrator confirms Elijah's status as a prophet (18:36). The narrator's comment in 18:36 occurs only in the MT and is absent from all other manuscripts. Seeing that the MT does not include the term "prophet" in 17:1, we can assume that the later editors of the MT wanted to convey the idea that Elijah only becomes a prophet in chapter 18.

The importance of this chapter is also signalled by a change in movement. The opening verses (18:1–17) are characterized by the horizontal movements of three heroes—Ahab, Obadiah, and Elijah. However, the horizontal movements stop starting from v. 18 and the prophets, people and Elijah move vertically.<sup>33</sup> Much like 17:17–24, so too does this episode underline that Elijah has to stop moving horizontally and must climb up to the top of Mount Carmel in order to reach a new stage in his life.

The appearance of new heroes on the scene furthermore underlines the shift in the focus and theme. Besides Obadiah, Jezebel and Ahab, chapter 18 features two groups of prophets: the prophets of the Lord who were executed by Jezebel or hidden by Obadiah and the prophets of Baal and Asherah. The narrator describes the latter as "the prophets of Baal (who were) four hundred and fifty and the prophets of Asherah (who were) four hundred, those (who are) eating at the table of Jezebel" (18:19). This verse seems to be the result of different redactions. It was reasonably argued that the original text did not contain the reference to the prophets of Asherah (in italics) "the prophets of Baal (who were) four hundred and fifty and the prophets of Asherah (who were) four hundred, those (who are) eating at the table of Jezebel." The addition of "and the prophets of Asherah (who were) four hundred" could be explained as harmonization with 1 Kgs 16:33 and 2 Kgs 13:6.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the apposition "those (who are) eating at the table of Jezebel" was originally linked only with the prophets of Baal and only later with the prophets of Asherah. Thus, the confrontation is presented not only as one between Elijah and Ahab, but also one between Jezebel's prophets and the Lord's prophets, and consequently, between Jezebel's prophets and Elijah as the only prophet of the Lord.

Putting all these elements together we can notice that the introduction of the title "prophet," the change in the hero's movements, the appearance of new heroes, and the conflict

32 The MT uses the preposition *lamed* (לְיְהוָה) that underlines Elijah's affiliation with God, contrary to the prophets of Asherah and Baal whose affiliation is expressed by means of the genitive (1 Kgs 18:19). This nuance is not present in the Greek manuscripts that use the genitive in both cases.

33 The discussion between Ahab and Elijah 18:17–19 encourages the heroes to climb Mount Carmel and thus move vertically. The ellipsis between vv. 19–20 and 21 presupposes that Elijah, the prophets of Baal and the people climbed to the top of Mount Carmel.

34 A. Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher. Die Hebräische Vorlage der Ursprünglichen Septuaginta als Älteste Textform der Königsbücher* (OBO 199; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004) 32–33. This argument was recently reviewed by P. Hugo, *Les deux visages d'Élie. Texte massorétique et Septante dans l'histoire la plus ancienne du texte de 1 Rois 17–18* (OBO 217; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2006) 270–276.

between Jezebel's prophets and Elijah point to a new moment in Elijah's life. According to the MT, Elijah becomes a prophet only in the context of a fierce confrontation with other prophets. While the previous phases of Elijah's life were restricted to a limited number of people, chapter 18 throws Elijah into the midst of the people and Jezebel's prophets. The potential increase in the number of heroes goes hand in hand with increasing suspense. The confrontation is no longer a private matter between a foreign woman and Elijah, but between the royal court and Elijah in the presence of the whole of Israel.<sup>35</sup>

The narrative tension is achieved once again by a collision of two promises. On the one hand, Elijah was asked by God to meet Ahab (18:1), and he even confirms his intention to meet Ahab in the oath he swears to Obadiah (18:15), which echoes the oath style in 17:1. On the other hand, Ahab's anger made him a mortal enemy of Elijah. If he did not meet Ahab, Elijah would die because of his own oath (18:15), but to meet Ahab would mean death at the hands of the king and his wife, who had already murdered prophets like Elijah. The confrontation between Ahab and Elijah begins in 16–19 and continues during the confrontation between Jezebel's prophets and Elijah.

This confrontation brings out a new aspect of Elijah's character. He confronts the king, his policy and religious activities, stands up for the Lord, challenges the people and the prophets of Baal and Asherah, repairs the altar, performs rituals, invokes God, performs a fire miracle, brings the people to conversion, and finally, executes<sup>36</sup> the false prophets. Elijah's way of speaking and acting is radically different not only from his conduct in chapter 17 but also from the words and deeds of other prophets in the Books of Kings. The confrontation at Mount Carmel transforms the man of God into a unique prophet of the Lord.

While the previous two transformations were triggered by the poor widow of Zarephath, the transformation from the man of God to the prophet was triggered by the queen's hostile attitude towards the prophets of the Lord.

## 6. Elijah the Man Standing Before the Lord

1 Kgs 19 describes the final step in Elijah's transformation. Jezebel is once again the woman whose oath feeds the narrative suspense. Here, the wording is different from that of Elijah in 17:1 and of the widow in 17:15. While Jezebel's threat leads Elijah to depression (Greek manuscripts read "he was afraid"), it also lets him experience the tender care of God on Mount Horeb, just as in the Cherith episode (19:1–8). The intertextual links in verses 3–8 recall similar experiences of major biblical figures: the presence of two angels at

35 The text alludes to the Sinai pericope in Exodus 19: 32–34. The people in both stories are to observe God's marvelous deeds. In both stories the people abandoned the Lord. In both stories the people return to the Lord after the intervention of the prophet J.T. Walsh, *Ahab. The Construction of a King* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2006) 29–31.

36 His executing of the false prophets can be also considered a cultic gesture (שָׁחַט; 8:40) contrary to cutting off/killing of Jezebel (כָּרַת in 18:4 or הָרַג in 18:14).

the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, the stories of Hagar’s escape attempt in Genesis 16:7–8 and her expulsion from the family in 21:15–19, and the plea to die in Jonah 4:6–7. Thanks to Jezebel’s assault, Elijah could experience important formative moments like those attributed to other major biblical figures.

The importance of the moment that follows Jezebel’s intimidation of Elijah is once again signalled by a change in Elijah’s movements. In 19:1–8, Elijah moves horizontally, but in v. 9 he is asked to climb Mount Horeb, which is the third time that Elijah moves vertically. A comparison of Elijah’s three ascents – to the upper chamber, up Mount Carmel and to the summit of Mount Horeb – suggests that the scribes intentionally increased the height from the first climb to the third. In this chapter, Elijah is asked to reach a mountaintop that corresponds to the apex of his inner transformation.

Having climbed Mount Horeb, Elijah is confronted directly by God. In this encounter, Elijah defines himself as a zealous prophet<sup>37</sup> who has been attacked by Jezebel. However, Elijah again imitates the criticism of the woman in 17:17–24. Just as the woman had doubted that Elijah was truly a man of God, so too does Elijah challenge God to show that he is truly the God of Israel. God responds to Elijah’s challenge directly and explains what it means to be the prophet of the Lord: “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord!” In 1–2 Kgs, the phrase “to stand before the Lord” appears only in 1 Kgs 22:21, describing a spirit who went out and stood before the Lord:

וַיֵּצֵא הָרוּחַ וַיַּעֲמֵד לְפָנַי יְהוָה (1 Kgs 22:21)

צָא וְעַמְדָה בְּהַר לְפָנַי יְהוָה (1 Kgs 19:11)

These similarities suggest that the Lord understands Elijah’s claim to be a zealous prophet as equivalent to being a spirit that is uniquely privileged to stand before the Lord. Since the spirit in 1 Kgs 22 was one of God’s servants sent out for a specific mission, Elijah, while at the mountaintop, experiences the presence of God in a specific way that makes him similar to God’s servant at the divine court. Yet again, it was a foreign woman who triggered Elijah’s inner transformation and who brought his formation to a conclusion. A zealous prophet was transformed into a prophet who not only obeyed the word of God but was also allowed to experience God’s very nature by standing before him.

## 7. Dating of the MT Interpretation

The dating of the MT redaction of the Elijah cycle has been highly debated.<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this paper, let me present a few elements that can contextualize our discussions. The term “prophet” is absent from the MT, the G<sup>Anr.</sup> and from the Vetus Latina in 1 Kgs 17:1/3 Kgdms 17:1. It is reasonable to suggest that the original text did not contain

<sup>37</sup> Since Elijah speaks about the prophets who were executed, we can conclude that the “zealous one” means a “zealous prophet.”

<sup>38</sup> For the two most recent proposals, see McKenzie, *1 Kings*, 25–36, 47–53, 97–102 and W. Thiel, *Könige. II. 1. Könige 17,1–22,54* (BKAT 9/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019) 15–315.

the term “prophet” in 1 Kgs 17:1. The presence of the term in the G<sup>B</sup> and in other versions, including Syriac and Ethiopic, may suggest that these versions added it to reveal Elijah’s character.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the rephrasing of 1 Kgs 18:36 in the MT also points to a later editorial intervention.<sup>40</sup> I suggest that the original text did not contain the term “prophet” either in 17:1 or in 18:36. The addition of this term reflects two different developments of the text: the MT that retained the omission of the term in 17:1 but added it in 18:36, as well as the G<sup>B,A</sup> followed by Syriac and Ethiopic traditions, which added the term in 17:1 but not in 18:36. This approach suggests that the MT contains a later intervention in the Elijah cycle.

We have already noted the absence of the proper name “Elijah” in 17:2–7, which originally occurred at least in 17:2, as reflected by different manuscripts. However, the proper name appears in 17:8–16, and the MT even makes an addition containing the proper name in 17:15. These two elements may also point to an MT editorial intervention to emphasize that Elijah becomes what his name  $\text{יְהוֹשֻׁעַ}$  means after the crisis introduced in 17:7 and during the confrontation with the poor widow of Zarephath.

All these additions and omissions in the MT should not be interpreted as scribal mistakes but rather as intentional editorial choices that, as I have argued, aimed at presenting how Elijah became the great prophet.

Comparing Ben Sirah’s interpretation of Elijah in Sir 48:1,<sup>41</sup> we see that Ben Sirah’s text relies on the G<sup>B,A</sup> interpretation that all of Elijah’s actions are the actions of the prophet. The concept of Elijah’s inner transformation is absent in Ben Sirah. I propose that the MT revision of Elijah is of a very late date. The MT revision of the Elijah cycle might have aimed at showing to the readers of the late Hellenistic/Roman period how a simple man from Tishbe was gradually transformed into the famous prophet Elijah. The man from Tishbe had to go through different challenges and crises to become a man of God, and finally, a prophet who stood before the Lord. The key role in this transformation was played by two foreign women and was signified by the shift in Elijah’s movements. This idea seems to have been an important message addressed to the biblical readers: first, that to become a prophet requires a long process of internal transformation; second, that to be transformed as Elijah was, human beings should stop moving horizontally on the same plane but seek to ascend in the spiritual life; third, that foreigners, whether like the friendly widow or the hostile queen, present not only difficulties but also opportunities that God can use to reform his people, just as such conflicts transformed a simple man into a prophet.

39 Cf. Montgomery, *Kings*, 294; McKenzie, *1 Kings*, 85–86.

40 McKenzie, *1 Kings*, 105.

41  $\text{καὶ ἀνέστη Ἡλίας προφήτης ὡς πῦρ}$  (Then Elijah arose, a prophet like fire; Sir 48:1);  $\text{Καὶ εἶπεν Ἡλίου ὁ προφήτης ὁ Θεσβείτης}$  (3 Kgs<sup>B</sup> 17:1).

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