

The Chronicler's Non-mention of Elisha

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In 2 Chr 21,12-15 the Chronicler cites a "letter" which "came" from the prophet Elijah to Jehoram of Judah¹. Scholars have long disputed if and how this item of Chronistic Sondergut can be squared with what both the general sequence and the specific dating indications of the Book of Kings suggest concerning the relative chronologies of king and prophet². In the face of such difficulties, some have suggested that the "from Elijah" in 2 Chr 21, 12 was originally "from Elisha"³. Alternatively, it has been proposed that Elijah's letter was delivered for him after his "translation" by Elisha⁴, or that, during his days on earth, Elijah communicated the content of the letter to Elisha with instructions that he put this in written form at a later date⁵.

As such, the above suggestions have little positively to recommend them, and are generally discounted in contemporary scholarship⁶. They do, however, serve to point up the noteworthy fact that the Chronicler never actually mentions Elisha who figures so largely in Kings. That such a mention might, however, well have been expected on the Chronicler's part appears from several considerations. First of all, one notes the plethora of prophetic fi-

1 On this passage, see recently B.J. DIEBNER, Überlegungen zum 'Brief des Elia' (2 Chr 21,12-15), *Henoch* 9 (1988) 197-228.

2 On the complicated chronological issues here, see the commentaries on *Chronicles*.

3 Thus e.g.: J. CLERICUS, *Veteris Testamenti libri historici*, Amsterdam, 1708, 607-608; N. SCHLÖGL, *Die Bücher der Chronik*, Wien, 1911, 172, ad loc.

4 So e.g.: C.F. KEIL, *Apologetischer Versuch über die Bücher der Chronik und über die Integrität des Buches Esra*, Berlin, 1833, 313-314.

5 So e.g., O. ZÜCKLER, *Die Bücher der Chronik*, Leipzig - Bielefeld, 1874, 260.

6 Note e.g., that both the Hebrew textual tradition and the versions are unanimous in reading "Elijah" in 2 Chr 21,12.

gures with which the Chronicler fills his work⁷. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find, as T. WILLI points out, that "die wichtigsten Propheten aus dem früheren Werk (Dtr) erscheinen selbstverständlich in der Chronik"⁸. WILLI goes on to substantiate his affirmation by citing a whole series of "prophets" from Nathan through Huldah whom the Chronicler does, in fact, "borrow" from Dtr. In light of this observation, one can, however only wonder: how is it that the Chronicler does not make room in his presentation for Elisha who surely ranks among the "most important" of all Dtr's prophets? A possible answer to this question is that Elisha was a "Northern" prophet, and that the Chronicler's non-mention of him is simply a function of his (virtual) suppression of the North's history (see below). Upon reflection, however, such an answer shows itself to be less than satisfactory as an explanation. For, what one finds in several instances, is that the Chronicler contrives to make a place in his Southern-oriented work for the "Northern" prophets of Dtr by "Judaising" them. Elijah's letter is, of course, a case in point. Here, in contrast to Dtr where Elijah's prophetic functioning is confined to the North (and Phoenicia)⁹, the Chronicler represents him as intervening in Judean affairs¹⁰. Also elsewhere, however, the Chronicler proceeds in similar fashion. In 2 Chr 19,2-3 he has Jehu son of Hanani who in 1 Kgs 16,1-4.7 pronounces a doom oracle against the Israelite king Baasha address himself to Jehoshaphat of Judah. Likewise in 2 Chr 16,7-10 he relates a confrontation between the Judean king Asa and that Hanani whom 1 Kgs 16,1 mentions in passing as the father of Jehu. Why then should the Chronicler not do something analogous with Elisha, thereby claiming this key prophetic figure for Judah, the "true Israel"?

Finally to be noted is one more specific consideration that, seemingly, should have predisposed the Chronicler to make room in his work for Elisha. In 2 Kings 9 the Deuteronomist depicts Elisha as the instigator of Jehu's coup which overthrows the infamous house of Ahab. The Chronicler, for his

7 On "prophecy" in Chronicles, see recently R. MICHEEL, *Die Seher- und Propheten-Überlieferungen in der Chronik*, Frankfurt, 1983.

8 *Die Chronik als Auslegung*, Göttingen, 1972, 216.

9 In 1 Kings 19 (see "Beersheba" in v. 3) Elijah does pass through the south on his way to Horeb; he does not, however, deliver any oracles there, nor is he represented as having dealings with the inhabitants.

10 On the motivations underlying this "transfer", see the article of DIEBNER cited in n. 1, pp. 209-211.

part, fully shares both the Deuteronomist's antipathy towards Ahab's line as well as his assessment of Jehu's revolt as a divinely mandated one, see especially 2 Chr 22,7-8 (contrast Hos 1,4). Why then should he fail to make mention of the initiator of that revolt, particularly given his habit of working prophetic figures into his presentation at every opportunity? Thus, from several points of view, the Chronicler's non-mention of Elisha does seem a matter that calls for some effort at explanation.

By way of background to my proposal concerning the above problem, I begin by recalling that, on occasion, it is clear that the Chronicler deliberately opts not to use episodes of Samuel and Kings which were not in accordance with that version of the people's history he wishes to convey. This procedure is evident e.g., in his passing over David's sin with Bathsheba and its bloody sequels (compare 2 Samuel 12 - 1 Kings 2) as well as Solomon's apostasy (compare 1 Kgs 11,1-9). On a still larger scale the Chronicler's technique of deliberate non-utilization shows itself in his abovementioned "bracketing" of the history of the Northern kingdom (except in so far as this impinges on events in the South). The above instances of the technique in question are generally recognized. In addition, however, as I have tried to show elsewhere, there are reasons to believe that, while aware of and even utilizing elements of their words as recorded in the "prophetic books", the Chronicler has consciously avoided citing the pre-exilic "classical prophets" (apart from Isaiah and Jeremiah) by name- mostly for reasons of "ideological incompatibility"¹¹. Thus e.g., the Chronicler's work evidences numerous terminological and contentual contacts with Ezekiel's book. Nevertheless, he denies him mention (contrast his references to Ezekiel's contemporary Jeremiah) primarily, I suggest, because, with his well-known "pro-Levite" stance, the Chronicler took offense at Ezekiel's words concerning the Levites in Ezek 44,10-14. Given the foregoing indications, however, the possibility seems worth exploring that something similar is operative in the Chronicler's failure to mention the prophet Elisha, i.e. his doing so is a matter, not of a chance oversight- which is, in any case a priori unlikely given the prominence accorded him in Dtr- but rather a

11 See my *The Non-mention of Ezekiel in Dtr, Jeremiah and Chronicles*, in *Ezekiel and His Book*, Leuven, 1986, 340-343, esp. pp. 342-343; *The Classical Prophets in the Chronistic History*, BZ NF 32 (1988), 100-107.

conscious decision, motivated by some element of the Deuteronomist's presentation of this figure which he found strongly repugnant.

In fact, it is, I believe, possible to identify an item in the Deuteronomist's portrayal of Elisha¹² which might well have rendered him persona non grata to the Chronicler. In this connection, I wish to call attention to the story of the campaign of the three kings against Moab recounted in 2 Kings 3. As will be recalled, the anti-Moabite troika in this narrative consists of Jehoram of Israel, Jehoshaphat of Judah and the unnamed king of Edom. It will further be recalled that the narrative relates an "inquiry" by the three kings directed to the prophet Elisha who speaks derogatively of Jehoram (2 Kgs 3,13), but with respect of Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 3,14). But now, such a narrative would seem, on several grounds very much suited to the purposes of the Chronicler who allots Jehoshaphat no less than four chapters (2 Chronicles 17-20), the bulk of which consist of Sondergut, even as he emphasizes Jehoshaphat's dealings with the North (see 2 Chr 18,1-34// 1 Kgs 22,1-35; 20,35-37//1 Kgs 22,48-49) and interactions with prophets (see 2 Chr 18,1-34//1 Kgs 22,1-35, Micaiah; 19,1-3, Jehu; 20,37, Eliezer) and likewise gives a generally positive evaluation of him (see 2 Chr 17,3-6; 20,32-33)¹³. Notwithstanding all these points of convergence between 2 Kings 3 and his own Joschafatbild, however, the Chronicler makes no use of the former (note that he reproduces almost verbally the somewhat parallel narrative of 1 Kgs 22,1-35 in 2 Chr 18,1-34). Why is this the case? In my view, the answer that can be proposed to this question is, at the same time, the key for explaining the Chronicler's "silence" concerning Elisha. Here, I begin by noting that in 2 Kgs 3,16-19 Elisha responds to the "inquiry" made of him by the kings with the announcement that Yahweh will give them complete victory over Moab¹⁴. In making such an announcement in his prophetic capaci-

12 On the Elisha material in Dtr, see: H.-C. SCHMITT, Elisha. Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie, Gütersloh, 1972; H.-J. STIPP, Elisha - Propheten - Gottesmänner. Die Kompositionsgeschichte des Elishazyklus und verwandter Texte, rekonstruiert auf der Basis von Text- und Literarkritik zu 1 Kön 20.22 und 2 Kön 2-7, St. Ottilien, 1987.

13 On the figure of Jehoshaphat in Chronicles, see R. DILLARD, The Chronicler's Jehoshaphat, Trinity Journal 7 (1987) 17-22.

14 I leave aside here the problem of how this announcement coheres with the actual course of subsequent events as related in 2 Kgs 3,20-27.

ty Elisha is at the same time implicitly legitimating Jehoshaphat's cooperation with the military schemes of Israel (and the "foreign" Edomites). Thereby, however, he stands in sharp opposition to the Chronicler's insistence- which he often places on the lips precisely of his prophetic figures (see e.g., 2 Chr 16,1-9; 18,1-34; 19,1-3; 20,35-37; 22,1-8; 25,6-8; 27,16-21)- that involvement by Judah with Israel or foreign nations that takes the form of joining their military or commercial ventures or appealing to them for assistance inevitably leads to divinely-effected disaster. It was then, I suggest, the portrayal of Elisha as prophetic legitimator of a course of action so at variance with his own ideal of Judean "non-entanglement" with both Israel and the "nations" in 2 Kings 3 which prompted the Chronicler to pass over, not only that narrative, but the very figure of Elisha.

In concluding I would simply stress that the fact that Elisha, alone among the major prophets of Samuel and Kings, receives no mention by the Chronicler is a matter worthy of more note than it hitherto seems to have received. My proposal, whatever its intrinsic merits, will have served a purpose if it helps direct scholarly attention to this notable instance of Chronistic Prophetenschweigen.