

Jesus, Elisha, and Moses: A Study in Typology

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Abstract

Because the Evangelists wrote with the intention of communicating specific, theological truths to their readers, the details they include in their gospels are important. Further, one way the story of the Bible unfolds and is theologically interpreted is through the use of repetition and typology. A number of the miracle accounts of Elisha are analogous to Jesus' own miracles as recorded in the gospels. Because of this, it is likely that the Evangelists are inviting readers to understand Jesus in light of Old Testament prophets and events, specifically as the appearance of a Prophet-like-Moses. A Jesus-Elisha typology, then, must be understood as only one strand of this more intricate prophetic typology.

Jesus, Elisha, and Moses

Introduction

The writers of the four canonical gospels were not mere biographers; they were theologians. They were propagandists in the best possible way. They were the Evangelists, tasked with the sacred privilege of faithfully compiling eyewitness testimony and portraying Jesus “as these eyewitnesses portrayed him,” giving that testimony “a permanent literary vehicle.”¹ Luke informs us that his gospel was written “so that you may know the exact truth about the things you [Theophilus] have been taught” (Lk. 1:4).² John, similarly, writes, “These [signs] have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Jn. 20:31). He goes on to note, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (Jn. 21:25). The accounts that are included in each gospel, then, along with the way in which they are presented, are specifically designed to fit each Evangelist’s theological agendas.

Typology

Any attempt to understand the foundations of the conceptual framework of the New Testament must come to terms with the New Testament’s Jewish background. In an important article, Bernard Robinson writes, “The Jews viewed history as a cyclic process: they tended always to see it not as a succession of separate incidents, but as a repetition,

¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 472.

² All English Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

with numerous variations, of a few basic themes.”³ In this way, repetition and typology are important components of biblical interpretation. “Typology is not concerned with words,” writes David Baker, “but with historical facts—events, people, institutions.”⁴ Tibor Fabiny summarizes Baker’s definition of typology as a way of understanding history instead of a method of studying the text itself.⁵ Typology is not *merely* concerned with verbal allusions or literary references, therefore. Instead, it is concerned about the underlying realities being discussed. Indeed, typology is dependent upon types having legitimate and concrete meanings in order to properly function. Thus, events like the exodus become paradigmatic for the way the Old Testament writers understand God’s redemptive acts, and persons like Adam become the example against which Jesus is compared, in this case, by Paul. Again, Baker helpfully defines a type as “a biblical event, person or institution which serves as an *example* or *pattern* for other events, persons or institutions”⁶ (emphasis added).

Because of this, typology must not be confused with allegory. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum helpfully distinguish typology from allegory, writing, “Typology is grounded in *history*, the *text*, and *intertextual* development, where various ‘persons, events, and institutions,’ are intended by God to correspond to each other, while allegory

³ Bernard P. Robinson, “Christ as a Northern Prophet in St. John,” *Scripture* 17 (1965): 105.

⁴ David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 179.

⁵ Tibor Fabiny, “Typology: Pros and Cons in Biblical Hermeneutics and Literary Criticism (From Leonhard Goppelt to Northrop Frye),” *RILCE. Revista De Filología Hispánica* 25, no. 1 (January 2009): 144.

⁶ Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 180.

assumes none of these things.”⁷ Allegory attempts to see past the facts of an account to learn a deeper meaning; typology, on the other hand, seeks to learn the facts of an account and compare them to similar persons, events, and institutions in the story of the Bible. From the perspective of the human authors of Scripture, many saw themselves as carrying on this interpretive legacy, telling their stories in such a way that the reader would recall an earlier person, event, or institution. Robinson describes this methodology as *midrashic*, which he uses in his article “to indicate the way in which later events were seen as a heightened repetition of earlier ones.”⁸ For example, Gentry and Wellum note that after Adam, many other characters appear in biblical history who take on Adam’s role of obedient son, such as Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David.⁹ Yet, these “Adams” are all insufficient to accomplish Adam’s task; only in Jesus do readers see the last Adam, the one in whom ultimate fulfillment comes (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-49).¹⁰ Thus, the process of interpretation must begin with a grammatico-historical hermeneutic, seeking to discover meaning within the text.¹¹ Then, interpreters can seek to engage in “theological reflection” and attempt to understand the legitimate correspondences embedded in the Scriptures.¹²

⁷ Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 38.

⁸ B. Robinson, “Christ as a Northern Prophet in St. John,” 105.

⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: the Search for Meaning*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 19.

¹² Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 181.

This way of writing the accounts of important biblical characters is seen especially in the characters of Moses/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha, and Jesus/Apostles. In each new generation, the ministry of the former is continued in a significant way.¹³ Moses, the quintessential prophet in the Old Testament, had a unique relationship with YHWH; the text notes, “Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Dt. 34:10-12). Yet, immediately before this verdict, the text says, “Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Dt. 34:9). In the first chapters of Joshua, this conclusion is reiterated by God’s promise of His presence with Joshua just as He had been with Moses (Josh. 1:5), the promise of the people to follow Joshua as they had followed Moses (Josh. 1:16-17), Joshua’s sending scouts into the land as Moses had (Josh. 2:1), and the miraculous parting of the waters at the Jordan River as at the Sea of Reeds, such that the people cross on dry ground (Josh. 3:14-17).¹⁴ The magnitude of this connection is difficult to overemphasize. Joshua is

¹³ Interestingly, as John Frame observes, these three divisions represent the three major clusters of miracles in biblical history. Given the Evangelists’ accounts of Jesus’ fellowship with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, these characters are important to take notice of. See John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: an Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 166.

¹⁴ David J. Zucker, “Elijah and Elisha: Part 1, Moses and Joshua,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 40 no. 4 (December 2012): 227.

depicted as the successor and, in many ways, the retelling of Moses in a new context: a new Moses.

Then, as the story progresses, Elijah, too, is presented to readers as “distinctly Mosaic.”¹⁵ In 1 Kings 19, after a miraculous triumph over the prophets of Baal at Carmel, he flees from Jezebel into the wilderness and, after being strengthened by rest and by the provisions of the angel of the LORD, he “went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God” (1 Kgs. 19:8). Then, when he arrives at a cave at the mountain, the presence of the LORD passes before him, and “when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave” (1 Kgs. 19:13). This reminds readers of Moses’ own forty day and forty night experience at Sinai, the mountain of God. He, too, beheld the presence of the LORD, shielded from God’s full glory being hid in the cleft of the rock (see Ex. 24:18; 34:22, 28).¹⁶

If Elijah is seen as another new Moses, Elisha is presented as both a new Elijah and as a new Moses again. In this way, he is a retelling of Joshua. Keil and Delitzsch write, “By the performance of similar and equal miracles (such as the division of the Jordan, 2 Kgs. 2:8 and 14; the increase of the oil, 2 Kgs. 4:3ff. compared with 1 Kgs. 17:14ff.; the raising of the dead, 2 Kgs. 4:34ff. compared with 1 Kgs. 17:19ff.) Elisha proved himself to be the divinely-appointed successor of Elijah, who was carrying

¹⁵ B. Robinson, “Christ as a Northern Prophet in St. John,” 105.

¹⁶ D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 444.

forward his master's work (just as by the drying up of the Jordan Joshua proved himself to be the continuer of the work of Moses)."¹⁷ Raymond Brown also associates Elisha with Elijah by noting that the two even have the same eulogy: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kgs. 2:12, 13:14).¹⁸ Further, as David Zucker writes, "Some of Elisha's deeds have a Moses-like quality," including his sweetening of the waters of Jericho as Moses had done at Marah (2 Kgs. 2:19-22; Ex. 15:23-25).¹⁹ Thus, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor can state, "An unmistakable literary affinity exists between the tale of Moses and that of Elisha."²⁰ To insist on only comparing the prophet to Elijah is not in keeping with the design of the text; the author of this history is inviting readers to see elements of both Elijah's and Moses's ministries, and to thus see Elisha as a retelling of both prophets in the form of a new Joshua.

Lastly, Jesus is presented as a new Elisha, a new Elijah, a new Joshua, and, most foundationally, a new Moses; perhaps it would be better to say the new and, in this case, the *greater*, as these particular types point beyond themselves to their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.²¹ In discussing this *midrashic* and typological quality of biblical history, Robinson warns against over-emphasizing any one strand's importance to Jesus's character-portrait. In particular, he warns against over-emphasizing the "Northern

¹⁷ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1866, repr., 1996), vol. 3, 164.

¹⁸ Raymond E. Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," *Perspective (Pittsburgh)* 12, no. 1 (1971): 101.

¹⁹ Zucker, "Elijah and Elisha: Part 1, Moses and Joshua," 228.

²⁰ Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: a New Translation*, Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 37.

²¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 41-43.

Prophet” motif, which he uses to describe the pattern of the combined ministries of Elijah and Elisha present in Jesus’ ministry in the gospels.²² The principle is well-worth reiterating. No one image or typology can properly contain the fullness of Jesus’ life and ministry. Instead, a myriad of pictures, examples, metaphors, characters, and descriptions are used by the biblical authors. Where continuity is present in one discourse, the next may yield profound discontinuity. Thus, in the following discussion about Elisha and Jesus, the reader should seek to observe legitimate correspondences without feeling the need to discount any discontinuities or more important and apparent typologies. The Elisha-Jesus typology is a real and present—but by no means exhaustive—strand of a larger typological web in the story of the Bible.

Elisha and Jesus

In observing the relationships between Old Testament characters and the gospels’ presentations of Jesus, Brian Pate notes that the life of Elisha “patterns the life of Christ.”²³ Further, he writes, “If John the Baptist was the new Elijah (Mal 3:1; Mk. 1:2), then it is probable that Jesus is to be seen as a new Elisha.”²⁴ Jesus himself acknowledges the Baptist should be seen as “the Elijah who is to come,” the Elijah *redivivus* who was promised in Malachi; this is the clear testimony of the Synoptic Gospels.²⁵ He will be

²² B. Robinson, “Christ as a Northern Prophet in St. John,” 108.

²³ Brian Pate, “Who is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 4 (2016): 744.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ S. Michael Ahn, *The Christological Witness Function of the Old Testament Characters in the Gospel of John*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2014), 108-09.

“filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb” and will “go before” the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” the angel announces (Lk. 1:15-17).²⁶ After Peter, James, and John witness Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, they recognize that Jesus has identified the eschatological Elijah with John the Baptist (Mt. 17:11-13). If the Synoptics portray Jesus as embracing the Baptist’s identification as the eschatological Elijah, do they also simultaneously acknowledge his own role as an eschatological Elisha, Elijah’s successor? Did any of the Evangelists connect the ministries of Elisha and Jesus in any meaningful ways? If so, is there sufficient exegetical evidence to identify this as a form of typology? Brown writes, “It is in respect to miracles that we find the closest similarities between Jesus and Elisha.”²⁷ Therefore, this section will look at the similarities between some of Elisha’s miracles and Jesus’ miracles.

The Son Who Receives the Spirit

First, Elisha and Jesus are both sons who receive the spirit of their father. The accounts of Elisha and Jesus receiving a spirit of some kind display remarkable

²⁶ J. Severino Croatto has suggested that there is a division within the representation of Elijah within the OT. “Elijah I,” as he names him, is the prophetic miracle-worker found in the Deuteronomistic cycle in 1 and 2 Kings. Miracle accounts in the gospels that parallel the miracles of Elijah, therefore, can be partially understood as Jesus’ *imitation* of this Elijah. That Jesus was a miracle-worker links him to Elijah I, who was himself a miracle-worker. “Elijah II,” on the other hand, is the eschatological prophet promised in Malachi 4:5; this is the one who will come “before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.” That Elijah was caught up into heaven and did not die paved the way for this expectation of his eschatological return. (In Jewish tradition, there is a strong expectation for the return of not only Elijah, but also Enoch, who was also caught up to be with God before his death.) In the Synoptics, it is John the Baptist who embodies this Elijah II (a presentation not shared in John’s gospel). While it is true that the roles of miracle-worker and eschatological prophet are distinct, it is probably an overstatement to hold to this duality too rigidly. See J. Severino Croatto. “Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 451-465.

²⁷ Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” 89.

similarity.²⁸ Prior to the heavenly departure of Elijah, Elisha requests a *double portion* of Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs. 2:9). In the Law, the "double portion" was said to be the inheritance given by the father to his firstborn son (Dt. 21:17). By requesting this of Elijah, John Walton writes, "Elisha is requesting that he receive the status as the principal successor to Elijah."²⁹ This father-son relationship is confirmed by Elisha's cry, "My father, my father" at Elijah's translation (2 Kgs. 2:12), informing readers Elisha himself is aware of this comparison. Elisha understands that he needs "to be acknowledged as leader," a "descendant" of the already-confirmed leadership of Elijah for the credibility and enabling of his own ministry, so he asks for the "double portion."³⁰

This double portion is not one of material goods, however, it is the *spirit* of Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:9). The mention of "the Spirit of YHWH" by the "sons of the prophets" in the same context (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:15-16) and Obadiah's statement that "the Spirit of YHWH" will carry Elijah away in 1 Kgs. 18:12 implies this spirit requested by Elisha is, in fact, the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity.³¹ John Goldingay writes, "The powerful spirit or the spirit-energized power of Elijah . . . thus represents the powerful spirit of God."³² Because the frequent role of the Spirit is to empower God's people to

²⁸ Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," 88.

²⁹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 386.

³⁰ Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 209.

³¹ Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 45.

³² John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), I:795.

perform “divinely assigned tasks,” Elisha’s request is a recognition that Elijah’s success as a prophet of God is due to the Spirit’s empowerment and that Elisha will need the same empowerment to take up his master’s responsibility.³³

In a dramatic display after witnessing Elijah’s translation, Elisha tears his clothes in grief, picks up the cloak of Elijah and asks, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” (2 Kgs. 2:14). Then, striking the water, he divides the water of the Jordan and crosses over it, just as Elijah had done previously in the account (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:8). Then, the “sons of the prophets” who witness Elijah’s parting of the water and who stand by waiting see Elisha’s act say, “‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’ And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him” (2 Kgs. 2:15). Here, this serves to demonstrate that “the same Spirit controlling Elijah was Elisha’s also.”³⁴ Thus, as Volkmar Fritz comments, “He is expressly acknowledged as the legitimate successor of the prophet by his disciples.”³⁵

Analogously, the public ministry of Jesus begins when he is immersed by the Baptist at the Jordan River, possibly in a similar geographical area to Elisha’s receiving the spirit of his predecessor.³⁶ This public baptism is, first, a confirmation of Jesus’ divine sonship in a relational and not merely Messianic way; this sonship is “an existing

³³ Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 46.

³⁴ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 209.

³⁵ Volkmar Fritz, *1 and 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2003), 236.

³⁶ Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” 88.

status,” and “not the conferral of a new dignity.”³⁷ That Jesus is the object of the divine pronouncement, “You are My beloved Son” (Lk. 3:22) demonstrates that this baptism serves as a means of public proclamation of his divine sonship. Secondly, however, the baptism—and the accompanying descent of the Holy Spirit—also shows Jesus’ being “commissioned and equipped for his task.”³⁸ Indeed, he enters the wilderness to be tempted in the condition of being “full of the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 4:1). After this, he returns to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:14), and at this crucial juncture he reads from the book of Isaiah saying, “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” (Lk. 4:18-19). Importantly, then, the gospel-writer is portraying the Spirit of the Lord as the necessary agent of empowerment allowing Jesus to accomplish his divinely-appointed ministry. In this way, then, in the accounts of both Elisha and Jesus the son receives the spirit of his father to accomplish his divinely-given task.³⁹

³⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary On the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 155.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁹ While this is a legitimate appearance of continuity, it is also true that the imagery fits well with Moses/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus/Apostles typology. Just as the Spirit rests first on Moses followed by Joshua, and the Spirit rests on Elijah followed by Elisha, so the Spirit first rests on Jesus followed by the Apostles. Thus, we must recognize both the continuity of the Jesus-Elisha typology and its discontinuity.

Table 1- Son Who Receives the Spirit

ELISHA 2 Kgs.	<i>Son Who Receives the Spirit</i>	JESUS			
		Mt.	Mk.	Lk.	Jn.
2:9, 12, 15	<i>Public Recognition of sonship</i>	3:17	1:11	3:22	1:34
2:14-15	<i>Demonstration of God's Spirit empowering the son</i>	3:16, 4:1	1:10	4:1, 14	1:32

The Redeemer Who Rescues the Poor

Elisha and Jesus are both redeemers who rescue the poor. 2 Kings 4:1-7 begins by describing an economic crisis of the widow and sons of one of the “sons of the prophets,” the prophetic community. Apparently, the widow’s sons were at risk of being sold into debt-slavery, possibly for the accounts of her deceased husband.⁴⁰ Further, this poor, desperate widow lived in a male-dominated culture; no one would plead her case.⁴¹ However, as an expression of her trust in YHWH and His compassion for the helpless, she pleads her case before Elisha.⁴² In response, Elisha commands her to borrow her neighbors’ pots, jars, and other vessels and to begin pouring the little oil she owns into the containers. By miraculously multiplying the widow’s supply of oil which she is able to sell, Elisha acts as kinsman-redeemer, fulfilling the responsibility “to redeem a near relative from debt and slavery.”⁴³ This action, as Walter Brueggemann notices, is a

⁴⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 319; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 50.

⁴¹ Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 319.

⁴² Lissa Wray Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 322.

⁴³ Peter J. Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, Reprint ed., Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 188.

manifestation of the “sabbatic principle” and demonstrates the “deep Israelite conviction that debt must not finally be the decisive factor in social organization.”⁴⁴ Thus, Elisha’s miracle is to be seen as a means of ‘release.’⁴⁵

Jesus as kinsman-redeemer and bringer of release to the poor is the theological conclusion of Luke 4:18-21, in which Jesus applies Isaiah 61 to himself. The “favorable year of the Lord” (Lk. 4:18) likely alludes to “the ‘year of jubilee,’” writes I. Howard Marshall, “the year of liberation among men appointed by Yahweh (Lv. 25) and now made symbolic of his own saving acts.”⁴⁶ This liberation, at least in theory, meant Israelites’ fields were to rest from producing, people were to return to their own homes, debts were to be cancelled, and slaves were to be released.⁴⁷ In this passage, this great release—the cancelling of debts and the freedom from slavery—is applied spiritually, and now “is a way of referring to the era of salvation.”⁴⁸ Instead of only cancelling monetary debts, however, Jesus is concerned with cancelling sin debts; instead of only liberating the physically enslaved, he is concerned with liberating the spiritually enslaved.

Immediately after applying Isaiah 61 to himself, Jesus confronts his Jewish listeners with the ministries of Elijah and Elisha and uses their ministries to demonstrate

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 321.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 184.

⁴⁷ Ibid., see also Robert B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubilarial Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, TX: Schola Press, 1977).

⁴⁸ Leon L. Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 126.

that “no prophet is welcome in his hometown” (Lk. 4:24). After all, though there are many widows, only the widow at Zarephath receives aid from Elijah; though there are many lepers, only Naaman the Syrian receives cleansing from Elisha (Lk. 4:25-27). In both cases, it is not the Israelite who receives divine help, but the Gentile. Secondly, Jesus is bringing attention to “the socially weak (widows) and marginalized (lepers).”⁴⁹ Luke’s references to Elijah and Elisha, Brown notes, demonstrates that “the Elisha cycle is part of OT history that we know the Gospel writers were interested in.”⁵⁰ Thus, through theological reflection, the Evangelists indicate that both Elisha and Jesus can be seen as prophetic redeemers who rescue the poor.

Table 2- Redeemer Who Rescues the Poor

ELISHA 2 Kgs.	<i>Redeemer Who Rescues the Poor</i>	JESUS			
		Mt.	Mk.	Lk.	Jn.
4:7	<i>Manifestation of the sabbatic principle</i>	x	x	4:18-19	x

The Prophet Who Raises the Dead

The accounts of the miracle of resurrection in 2 Kings 4:8-37 and Luke 8:40-56 demonstrate both Elisha’s and Jesus’ willingness and ability to cleanse the unclean without the healers themselves being contaminated, as Peter Leithart observes.⁵¹ In 2 Kgs. 4:8-37, Elisha ministers to a rich woman who is not in need, but instead has an

⁴⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 191.

⁵⁰ Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” 98.

⁵¹ Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 191; R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 168.

excess. Because of this, she regularly extends hospitality to the prophet as he travels by the area. Further, she has a walled chamber or room built on the roof of her husband's house. Her response to Elisha's offer of repayment in the form of lobbying on her behalf to the king or military captain—"I live among my own people"—confirms her self-sufficiency" and signals to readers that "she needs nothing from the prophet."⁵² In spite of this response, Elisha asks Gehazi, "What then is to be done for her?" who notes that she has no son and that her husband is old. This condition changes when Elisha promises that the woman will bear a son.

Several years later, however, when the boy is out in the field with his father, he suffers from an unknown condition accompanied by great head-pain and then dies on his mother's lap. In response, the woman places her dead child on the bed in the prophet's chamber, shuts the door, and abruptly asks her husband if she can immediately visit the man of God. Though her husband does not understand the timing of her request, the woman leaves to see Elisha.⁵³ Upon being granted access to Elisha, the woman throws herself down at his feet. Moved by her gesture, Elisha prays to God for the first time in the chapter and ultimately succeeds in resuscitating the child by stretching himself over the child, making direct physical contact. Importantly, "Instead of becoming unclean by his contact with the boy's body, Elisha's body communicates life to the boy's dead

⁵² Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 323.

⁵³ Gene Rice, "A Great Woman of Ancient Israel (2 Kings 4:8-27; 8:1-6)," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 60-63, no. 2 (2008-10): 69-85.

flesh.”⁵⁴ Thus, Elisha’s compassion results in the miraculous resurrection of the Shunammite woman’s son.

Similarly, in Luke 8:40-56, when Jesus is approached by Jairus, “a man of consequence in Capernaum society” whose daughter is desperately sick, he chooses to miraculously resurrect Jairus’s daughter.⁵⁵ The passage specifically mentions Jesus taking the child’s hand (Lk. 8:54), showing that, like in the Elisha account, the prophet has the power to cleanse that which is unclean.⁵⁶ R. Alan Cole writes, “Jesus never hesitated to contract ritual defilement by touching a leper, or blood, or the dead, precisely because his touch at once cleansed and revived . . . others ‘contracted’ life and purity from Jesus, and not he the impurity from them.”⁵⁷

In Luke 7, a chapter earlier, Luke reports Jesus’ performing of two miracles: the first is Jesus’ healing of the centurion’s servant at Capernaum, and the second is the resurrection of the widow’s only son at Nain. This second miracle provides another example of Jesus’ resurrection power and its connection with the ministries of two Old Testament prophets. While the account of the centurion’s son is told by another evangelist (Matt. 8:5-13), Luke’s inclusion of the resurrection at Nain is unique to his gospel. Further, this is the only New Testament reference to the city of Nain. Emily

⁵⁴ Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 191; see also Numbers 19.

⁵⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 235.

⁵⁶ For another example, see Thomas Louis Brodie. “Jesus as the New Elisha: Cracking the Code,” *The Expository Times* 93, no. 2: 39-42.

⁵⁷ Cole, *Mark*, 168.

Thomassen suggests that Luke uses both literary and geographical allusions to compare Jesus' prophetic role to that of Elijah and Elisha.⁵⁸ Importantly, all three resurrected an only son: Elijah at Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:8-24), Elisha at Shunem (2 Kgs. 4:8-37) and Jesus at Nain.⁵⁹ The details of Jesus' resurrecting the boy at Nain most strikingly match Elijah's miracle at Zarephath, except for the geographical location.⁶⁰ However, even in Kings, Elisha's resurrecting the Shunamite woman's son "was intended to portray Elisha as a prophet like his predecessor, Elijah."⁶¹ Overlapping details like the setting of an upper-room chamber and the prophets' stretching themselves out over the boy multiple times confirms this.⁶² Therefore, Luke feels the freedom to report on this miracle at Nain because it not only closely matches the details of the Elijah and Elisha miracles, but also because it shares geographical similarity with the Elisha narrative. Nain and Shunem are both located on the slopes of the Hill of Moreh, overlooking the Jezreel Valley.⁶³ That the people of Nain may have identified this connection is implied when, after witnessing Jesus' miraculous resurrection, they began exclaiming, "A great prophet has arisen

⁵⁸ This gives some credibility to B. Robinson's assertion that readers should understand Jesus' relationship to Elijah and Elisha as that of "the Northern Prophet" instead of individually. While "the Northern Prophet" motif is a helpful category, there does seem to be value in examining the prophets as individuals instead of merely as a unit.

⁵⁹ Emily J. Thomassen, "Shared Memories of Resurrection on the Hill of Moreh." In *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, edited by Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle. Lexham Geographic Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

⁶⁰ Ibid., "Parallel Accounts of Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus Raising an Only Son to Life."

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., "Shunem: An Old Testament Town on the Slopes of the Hill of Moreh."

among us!’ and ‘God has visited His people!’” (Lk. 7:16). Apparently, “the people of Nain remembered the last time a great prophet, Elisha, had performed a very similar miracle on the slopes of the same hill. And now, in their day, God had visited his people again.”⁶⁴

After they witness this miraculous display, John’s disciples go to ask Jesus, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?” (Lk. 7:20). Jesus responds with: “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me” (Lk. 7:22-23). He quotes from two texts in Isaiah, Isaiah 35:5 and Isaiah 61:1 (the passage which Jesus had already quoted in Luke 4). While both texts offer important insights into the way Jesus’ ministry is perceived by Luke, it is interesting to observe that he juxtaposes Jesus’ miracle-working power with his being “anointed” and “sent” so that he might “bring” and “proclaim” the good news of YHWH. Perhaps readers can understand these miracles as “divine confirmation of [the] prophet’s claim to be speaking for God.”⁶⁵ Regardless, these similarities suggest that Elisha and Jesus are both prophets who show compassion and raise the dead.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Thomassen, “The Reaction of the Crowds at Nain” In *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*.

⁶⁵ Norman L Geisler, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 94.

⁶⁶ Thomas Brodie proposes a sophisticated internalization of the Shunammite woman passage into Luke 7. Though the Luke passage contains allusions to the Elisha narrative, Brodie’s proposal remains unconvincing. See Thomas Louis Brodie. “Luke 7,36-50 as an Internalization of 2 Kings 4,1-37: A Study in Luke’s Use of Rhetorical Imitation,” *Biblica* 64 (1983): 457-485.

Table 3- Prophet Who Raises the Dead

ELISHA 2 Kgs.	<i>Prophet Who Raises the Dead</i>	JESUS			
		Mt.	Mk.	Lk.	Jn.
4:8	<i>Parent who might not normally be in need</i>	9:18	5:22	8:41	x
4:34	<i>Physical touch does not contaminate but confers life</i>	9:25	5:41	8:54	x
4:35	<i>The one who was raised to life is a child</i>	9:25	5:42	8:55	x
4:8-10, 32	<i>Miracle takes place on the Hill of Moreh</i>	x	x	7:11	x

The Provider Who Multiplies Loaves

Lastly, and most notably, Elisha and Jesus are both providers who multiply loaves. 2 Kings 4:42-44 describes a scene of one hundred men needing to be fed. A certain man comes to offer “the first fruits,” which Elisha accepts. Then, he commands his servant to allow the men to eat the “twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain” (v.42). His servant, possibly Gehazi, objects, asking “What, will I set this before a hundred men?” (v. 43). Elisha communicates the word of the LORD to them: “They shall eat and have some left over” (v. 43). Incredibly, everything happened “according to the word of the LORD” (v. 44). This is, simply, miraculous. Fundamentally, the miracle “shows the Lord’s care for his own” no matter the perceived possibility.⁶⁷

In the same way, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of at least five thousand people, a story attested to in all four canonical Gospels. In fact, this miracle is the only miracle—apart from the resurrection of Jesus—that is recorded in all four Gospels.⁶⁸ Though Jesus’

⁶⁷ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 218.

⁶⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 267.

disciples doubt that the five barley loaves and two fish available are going to be sufficient (Jn. 6:9), Jesus miraculously exceeds their expectations, ensuring all are fed (v. 11). At the conclusion, twelve baskets of leftovers remain (v. 13), demonstrating God's provision for His people.

Paul Anderson claims that the details in the Johannine and Marcan accounts of this miracle demonstrate a visible awareness of its connection with the Elisha story in 2 Kings 4.⁶⁹ In John 6:9, the word *παῖδαριον* is used to describe the young boy who gives the disciples his bread and fish (the Synoptics do not include the origin of the loaves and fish). This is the word's only occurrence in the New Testament, yet in the LXX it appears twice in the verses immediately preceding the parallel miracle account, there referring to Elisha's servant (see 2 Kgs. 4:38, 41).⁷⁰ Further, John's gospel is the only one to include the detail that the lad's loaves were *barley* loaves (6:9), the same detail as described in Elisha's miracle in 2 Kings 4:42. In Mark, there are also remarkable allusions to the Elisha miracle. Jesus says, "You give them something to eat!" (Mk. 6:37), just as Elisha had said, "Give them to the people that they may eat" (2 Kgs. 4:43). Further, Mark notes that the people sat in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mk. 6:40), while the other Synoptics omit this detail.⁷¹ This is a peculiar inclusion, yet one that is attested in the Elisha miracle: "What, will I set this before a hundred men?" (2 Kgs. 4:43). Of course, all four

⁶⁹ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 174.

⁷⁰ Carson and Beale, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 444.

⁷¹ Luke mentions only groups of fifty (Lk. 9:14).

Gospels relay that there were twelve baskets of food left over after the miracle, just as there was food left over with Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:44). These details suggest that “Jesus’ works were obviously associated with Elijah/Elisha typologies quite early.”⁷² This, in fact, is what we see in places like Mark 8:27-28, when the people interpret Jesus’ ministry as a coming of John the Baptist, Elijah, or “one of the prophets.” Jesus Himself is content to compare his ministry to that of Elijah and Elisha in Luke 4:24-27. Thus, it can be rightly said that Elisha and Jesus are both providers who multiply loaves to care for the people.

Table 4- Provider Who Multiplies Loaves

ELISHA 2 Kgs.	<i>Provider Who Multiplies Loaves</i>	JESUS			
		Mt.	Mk.	Lk.	Jn.
4:38, 41	<i>Παδαριον used of a supporting character in the narrative</i>	x	x	x	6:9
4:42	<i>Loaves multiplied are barley loaves</i>	x	x	x	6:9
4:43	<i>Command for the provider’s servants to feed the people</i>	14:16	6:37	9:13	x
4:43	<i>People numbered in hundreds</i>	x	6:40	x	x
4:44	<i>All the people are fed</i>	14:20	6:42	9:17	6:11
4:44	<i>Food left over after the miracle</i>	14:20	6:43	9:17	6:13

⁷² Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 174.

Typological Matrix

Thus far, several specific miracle accounts of Elisha have been compared to Jesus' similar miracles to demonstrate the continuity between their ministries. However, readers need a typological matrix—a theological grid—through which they can begin to understand the typological connection between Jesus and Elisha. The last miracle—the miraculous feeding of the crowd—serves as a helpful example.

While the account of Jesus' miraculous feeding in John 6 includes crucial verbal allusions to the Elisha narrative, the most fundamental analogy in its context is *not* that which exists between Jesus and Elisha; instead, it is that which exists between Jesus and Moses by way of the prophet-like-Moses motif. In the immediate context, the preceding chapter John 5:19-47 implies this.⁷³ Further, immediately after the miraculous feeding itself, the people exclaim, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (Jn. 6:14). This is a clear allusion to the prophet-like-Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-22.⁷⁴

John emphasizes this important connection with Moses by including a clear reference to God's provision of manna, “the bread out of heaven” (6:31) in the days of Moses and God's new provision of “the true bread out of heaven” (6:32) in Jesus Christ, who is Himself “the bread of life” (6:35). Additionally, in the next chapter Jesus says, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture

⁷³ There is a strong emphasis in this section on the Son's being sent by the Father. Just as Moses declares the Word of YHWH to the people, the Son of Man (introduced as the incarnate Word in John's Gospel) speaks as a new Moses. See Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 174.

⁷⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 271.

said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (7:37-38). This may have prompted those in his hearing to again recall Moses and the miraculous provision of water from the rock (Ex. 17:6, Num. 20:11), for some again said in response to this, “This certainly is the Prophet” (7:40).⁷⁵ Apparently, the working of Jesus’ signs and wonders accompanied by his profound sayings caused these Israelites to compare Jesus to the coming Prophet-like-Moses. To understand why, we should consider the promise in Deuteronomy 18 and the related description of a legitimate prophet in Deuteronomy 13, which may provide a matrix through which to understand Jesus’ relationship to Elisha.

The Prophet-like-Moses is a large typology on its own, far larger than the Jesus-Elisha typology. In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, Moses promises the people that in the future YHWH will “raise up for you a prophet like me from among you” (v.15). This prophet will act as an intermediary between God and the people in keeping with their request on Mount Sinai to avoid hearing His voice directly or seeing the fire of His presence, lest they die (vv. 16-17). The speech of this prophet will be divine-speech, speaking only what God commands him to speak (v. 20). The sure sign, therefore, that the prophet is truly sent from God is that all the things he speaks “in the name of the LORD” must come true; otherwise, this is the sure realization that the prophet is not speaking God’s words (v. 21-22).⁷⁶ In early Christology, the ministry of Jesus is explicitly linked with this significant prophetic figure by Peter and Stephen (Acts 3:22; 7:37, respectively).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid., 329.

⁷⁶ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 174.

⁷⁷ Kittel, ed., TDNT, Vol. 6, 845.

The promise of Deuteronomy primarily concerns itself with the prophet as speaker of the divine-word. However, Anderson points out, “From Deuteronomy 18:22 it is a short step to also considering divine signs and wonders as legitimizers of a prophet’s divine commission.”⁷⁸ The paradigm for false prophets in Deuteronomy 13 helps situate the promise of the Prophet-like-Moses: “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Dt. 13:1-3). The doing of supernatural signs serves as a powerful stamp of God’s approval on a prophet only when accompanied by the legitimate and tested words of God. Yet, even these signs *can* in some contexts demonstrate God’s approval and raising up of a prophet’s ministry.⁷⁹ This is seen, again, in the conclusion of Deuteronomy: “Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all *the signs and wonders* which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all *the mighty power* and for all *the great terror* which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Dt. 34:10-12, emphasis added).⁸⁰ As the conclusion of the Torah, the inclusion of this verse signals to readers that the author is indeed

⁷⁸ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 176.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

expecting a prophet to arise who will be like-Moses, presumably even in the doing of mighty signs and wonders.

As the biblical history unfolds, readers see this expectation is partially fulfilled by each new prophet, however imperfectly. Elijah's ministry as a prophet is confirmed by the mouth of a widow whose son Elijah miraculously raised from the dead. She says, "Now I know that you are a man of God and *that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth*" (1 Kgs. 17:24, emphasis added). His ministry is further confirmed at Mount Carmel by the spectacular falling of heavenly fire (1 Kgs. 18:16-46).⁸¹ Significantly, Elijah prays God would honor his request, saying, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel *and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word*" (1 Kgs. 18:36, emphasis added). Here, after the all-important vindication of YHWH's power in front of the pagan nations, Elijah is also concerned to vindicate his own claim as YHWH's prophet, recognizing the stringent but reasonable requirements of Deuteronomy 13 and 18.

This is further illustrated in the ministry of Elisha, a powerful prophet who performs twice the number of miracles as his predecessor, perhaps as a narrative confirmation of his request for the double portion of Elijah's spirit (an interpretation in keeping with Jewish tradition).⁸² Additionally, after Elisha purifies the waters, the text provides an explanatory comment saying, "So the waters have been purified to this day, *according to the word of Elisha which he spoke*" (2 Kgs. 2:22, emphasis added). After

⁸¹ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 176.

⁸² Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," 87-88.

promising the Shunammite woman that she would bear a son, “the woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, *as Elisha had said to her* (2 Kgs. 4:17, emphasis added). When he multiplies the loaves and grain telling them the LORD told him they would eat and have an abundance, “they ate and had some left over, *according to the word of the LORD*” (2 Kgs. 4:44, emphasis added). After Elisha (by way of his servant) tells Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan seven times to be healed of his leprosy, “[Naaman] went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, *according to the word of the man of God*; and his flesh was restored” (2 Kgs. 5:14, emphasis added).

Considering Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the Prophet-like-Moses, and Elijah and Elisha as partial-fulfillments, may be a helpful way of understanding Jesus’ individual typological relationship with Elisha. That is, Jesus and Elisha are typologically related *only* inasmuch as both are part of the prophetic typological spiral represented by Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha and fully embodied in Jesus Christ. It is valuable to consider each individual strand of the typological prophetic “web,” while also keeping in mind its part of the bigger picture.

Conclusion

The nature of revelation is that it is progressive; seeds which are planted in the beginning of the story grow into large, healthy trees toward the end. As important, epochal moments occur in biblical history, contemporary generations look to the Scriptures and reinterpret events to match the unfolding of God’s dealings with his people. Such it was with the expectation of the coming of Elijah. John Robinson argues

the relationship between Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus was not immediately clear.⁸³ Originally, there were mixed opinions as to what Malachi meant when God promised to send Elijah “before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). Yet, as Jesus lived and died, his followers quickly identified his role as the Expected One and the ultimate *greater than*. As such, it became apparent to these Christians that if Jesus was the ultimate demarcation line of history, certainly John the Baptist, as his announcer, was the eschatological Elijah they were expecting. If Jesus was the ultimate Prophet-like-Moses, certainly the prophets of old were shadows and types pointing to their final fulfillment in him. Further, if the Baptist was the eschatological Elijah, perhaps there was room to consider Jesus’ relationship to Elisha, the prophet who followed the ministry of his forerunner. From the perspective of the Evangelists, the details they include in their gospels certainly reflect the theological perspectives they are trying to communicate. That they narrate the life of Jesus using verbal and thematic allusions to the Elisha miracle-accounts informs modern readers that they are at the very least attempting to convey a correlation between the two prophets. Thus, while there is a real similarity in the Elisha cycle and the Gospel miracle accounts, it is only partial; it is present but is by no means exhaustive.⁸⁴ This is part of the good design of biblical typology. Each strand of the web gives us important and helpful—but never complete—insights into the character of the Son.

⁸³ John A. T. Robinson, “Elijah, John and Jesus: An Essay in Detection,” *New Testament Studies* 4, no. 4 (July 1958): 263-64.

⁸⁴ Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” 98.

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