

# Elijah, John and Jesus in a Lukan Perspective

NICO RIEMERSMA

Of all the Old Testament characters mentioned in Luke-Acts, Elijah may not appear the most often,<sup>1</sup> but he does play an important role.<sup>2</sup> Seven times his name is mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (1:17; 4:25, 26; 9:8, 19, 30, 33), whereby it is striking that this happens once in the overture (1:5–2:52) and all other times in sequence IIa (3:21–9:50) of the second part (3:1–24:53), especially at the end (9:1–50). In sequence IIb (9:51–24:53)<sup>3</sup> his name does not occur.<sup>4</sup> In the Acts of the Apostles, the second part of the Lukan *Doppelwerk*, his name is even completely absent.

A study of the way Elijah appears in the Gospel of Luke demonstrates that he appears once in the narrator's text, in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (9:28–36, see v. 30). All other times, the name Elijah is uttered by story characters: in 1:17 by the angel/messenger Gabriel, in 4:25–26 by Jesus, in 9:8 by 'some', in 9:19 by people from amongst the 'crowds' and in 9:33 by Peter. If we take a closer look at these statements, it strikes us that the first time the name Elijah is uttered in Luke (by the angel Gabriel), it is to further characterise John the Baptist: 'He will go out before him in the spirit and the power of Elijah' (1:17). Jesus mentions 'Elijah' twice. The first time in a time indication: 'in the days of Elijah' (4:25), the second time when Jesus speaks about Elijah's mission to a woman in Sarepta (Zarephath near Sidon) (4:26). In the statements in which people – from amongst the crowds – mention his name, they do so in response to the question about Jesus' identity (9:8.19). These people believe that Elijah has appeared in Jesus. Finally, Peter mentions Elijah's name in the context of his proposal to pitch three tents on the mountain: one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah (9:33).

An examination of the way in which the figure Elijah appears in Luke and Acts, however, cannot be limited to the places where his name is mentioned. This has to do with the fact that Luke alludes to Elijah in several places in his *Doppelwerk*. He does this as follows: by

---

\* This study is dedicated to Bart J. Koet, chairman of the 'Lucaswerkplaats', with whom I share the interest in 'intertextuality and Luke-Acts', with particular attention to the role of Elijah in Luke-Acts.

<sup>1</sup> Abraham appears fifteen times in Luke (1:55, 73; 3:8 (2x), 34; 13:16, 28; 16:22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30; 19:9; 20:37) and seven times in Acts (3:13, 25; 7:2, 16, 17, 32; 13:26); David twelve times in Luke (1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38, 39; 20:41, 42, 44) and eleven times in Acts (1:16; 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22 (2x), 34, 36; 15:16); Moses ten times in Luke (2:22; 5:14; 9:30, 33; 16:29, 31; 20:28, 37; 24:27, 44) and nineteen times in Acts (3:22; 6:11, 14; 7:20, 22, 29, 31, 32, 35, 37, 40, 44; 13:39; 15:1, 5, 21; 21:21; 26:22; 28:23) and Solomon occurs twice in Luke (11:31; 12:47) and three times in Acts (3:11; 5:12; 7:47).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Brodie goes further. He argues that Luke reproduces the Elia-Elisha structure and ethos of 1 Kings 16:29–2 Kings 13, see his article "Luke's Use of the Elijah-Elisha Narrative," in *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative in the Composition of Luke* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Joseph Verheyden, LNTS 493; London et al.: Bloomsbury, 2014), 6–29, esp. 7, and his booklet *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> For my view on the macrostructure of the Gospel of Luke, see Nico Riemersma, *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, structuur en theologie* (Middelburg: Skandalon, 2018), 37–49.

<sup>4</sup> Some manuscripts (A C D W Θ Ψ f1.<sup>13</sup> 33 ℞ lat syc.<sup>h</sup>) mention his name at the end of the first scene of sequence IIb: ὥς καὶ Ἠλίας ἐποίησεν (Luke 9:54).

shaping a scene in such a way that it reminds one of a scene from the Elijah stories (1 Kings 16:29–2 Kings 2:18) or by including a phrase that – strongly or less strongly – reminds one of Elijah from the Books of Kings or Malachi.

The result of this first exploration is that Luke does not connect Elijah with *one* story character, as in Mark and Matthew, but with *two*: John the Baptist and Jesus. It is mainly story characters that make the connection with either John or Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Elijah appears only once as a story character.

In this study I wish to examine more closely the way in which Luke gives Elijah a place in his narrative, precisely because of the complex Elijah-image found in the Gospel of Luke. We will pay attention to the way Luke portrays the relations between John and Elijah on the one hand (§ 2) and between Jesus and Elijah on the other hand (§ 3). That then brings us to the question how these two ‘sketches’ relate to each other (§ 4). However, we will begin with Elijah as an independent story character (§ 1).

## Elijah

The only time in Luke-Acts that Elijah appears as an independent story character, is also the last time that the name Elijah appears in the *Doppelwerk*.<sup>5</sup> This happens at the end of sequence IIa, in the story that has a pivotal function in the Gospel of Luke, that of the transfiguration of Jesus (9:28–36). In Jesus’ presence, Elijah appears alongside Moses. Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus about his exodus (ἐξοδος), which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (9:31).<sup>6</sup> From this fact two conclusions can be drawn:

(1) If Elijah acts in the presence of Jesus, Jesus can hardly be the returned Elijah, as is stated in 9:8 and 9:19 by people from amongst the crowds.<sup>7</sup>

(2) The fact that Luke presents Elijah as an independent character also makes an identification of Elijah with John illogical (see Mark 9:13, cf. Matthew 17:13). This may have been one of the reasons that Luke omitted the Elijah verses from his source (Mark 9:11–13). Another reason is the fact that Luke does not see ‘the restoring of all things’ (ἀποκαταστάσις πάντων), spoken of in Mark 9:12 (by Jesus!), as a task of John the Baptist, but of Jesus himself (Acts 3:21).

All this makes the reader curious how Luke views the relationship between John the Baptist and Elijah, respectively between Jesus and Elijah.

## John the Baptist and Elijah

The question of how Luke sketches John in relation to Elijah is answered very differently. Some interpreters are of the opinion that Luke portrays John as Elijah redivivus or as the new Elijah.<sup>8</sup> Others, including Walter Wink, hold exactly the opposite view: John is not the new

---

<sup>5</sup> So also Christian Blumenthal, “Elija bei Lukas,” *BZ NF* 61/1 (2017): 86-103, especially 91.

<sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul speaks of his (i.e. Jesus) εἴσοδος (‘entry’) (Acts 13:24).

<sup>7</sup> See also Jonathan Huddleston, “What Would Elijah and Elisha Do? Internarrativity in Luke’s Study of Jesus,” *JTI* 5/2 (2011): 265–281, esp. 279.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (BHT 17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977<sup>6</sup>), 19 (applies only to the ‘Vorgeschichte’).

Elijah.<sup>9</sup> Markus Öhler takes a position in between. The identification of John with Elijah, in the sense of being personally identical to Elijah, does not occur in Luke, Öhler points out, but the evangelist does regard the Baptist as a fulfilment of the Elijah-expectation, as it emerges from Malachi 3:1, 23.

The fact that such different answers have been arrived at can be explained by the fact that Luke, on the one hand, omits a number of Mark's references to John as the returning/coming Elijah (1), and on the other hand, does indeed see John in relation to Elijah (2):

(1) Luke does not include the two implicit Elijah-John references from the Gospel of Mark, the source he used, in his narrative. Thus, Mark's portrayal of John is missing where it concerns his clothing and food (Mark 1:6), a portrayal that strongly reminds one of Elijah: a hair robe and a leather belt around his loins (2 Kings 1:8).<sup>10</sup> We already saw above that Luke omitted the final conversation at the end of the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:10–13), in which the references to Elijah – and therewith implicitly to John – are left out (see Luke 9:28–36).<sup>11</sup> This Marcan Elijah is about Elijah as the person who will come and restore everything.

(2) Elijah is once explicitly brought into relation with John in the Gospel of Luke. This occurs in the story of the announcement of John's birth (1:17), where the angel Gabriel says about him: 'He will go out before him in the spirit and the power of Elijah.' Luke may mention Elijah here in relation to John, but he does not identify John here with Elijah. What he does do is to indicate that John stands in the line of Elijah. In John's spirit and power, the spirit and power of Elijah can be recognised. The above statement is immediately followed by the sentence 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children', words that remind the reader of Malachi 3:23 (cf. Sir 48:10), where it is said of Elijah that he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers.<sup>12</sup>

We cannot stop at this explicit reference to Elijah. Luke alludes to Elijah in two other places in the Gospel where John is mentioned: 1:76, where father Zacharias speaks the following prophetic words about his son: 'For you will go out before the Lord to prepare his ways,' and 7:27, where Jesus says about John: 'This is the one about whom it is written: "Behold, I send my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you".' In 7:27, Jesus repeats Malachi 3:1. The parallel structure of Malachi 3:1: 'Behold, I send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me' and 3:23: 'Behold, I send you the prophet Elijah,' suggests that the sending of the messenger before the day of the coming of the Lord

---

<sup>9</sup> Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 42–45.

<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that Luke does not pay attention to the clothing and food of John the Baptist. See in this regard Christoph G. Müller, "Kleidung als Element der Charakterzeichnung im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt: Ein Streifzug durch das lukanische Erzählwerk," *SNTSU* 28 (2003): 187–214, especially 204–207, who refers to 1:15 and 7:25, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Markus Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des alttestamentlichen Propheten im Neuen Testament* (BZNW 88; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 88, gives as explanation for this omission: 'Es ist vielmehr daran zu denken, daß Lk die Erwartung der Apokatastasis Jesus mit seiner Parusie zuspricht (Act 3:21; cf. 1:6). Die Bestätigung Jesu, daß die Wiederherstellung mit dem Kommen des Elia zusammenfalle, widerspräche der eschatologischen Konzeption des Lk.'

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, 82: 'Angefügt ist eine Wiederaufnahme der Eliaverheißung.' For a further intertextual analysis of Luke 1:17, see Bart J. Koet, "Elijah as Reconciler of Father and Son: From 1 Kings 16:34 and Malachi 3:22–24 to Ben Sira 48:1–11 and Luke 1:13–17," in *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes* (ed. Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol; DCLS 7; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 173–190.

(3:1) is identical with the sending of Elijah before the coming of the great and fearsome day of the Lord (3:23).<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:76 can, therefore, also be interpreted as a reference to this text.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these data:

(1) When Luke speaks of Elijah in relation to John, whether explicitly or implicitly, he makes exclusive use of data from the Book of Malachi. Luke does so in the same way as found in Malachi. When Malachi mentions Elijah (3:22–24), Luke then follows him (1:17). When Malachi does not explicitly mention Elijah's name (3:1), then Luke does not do so either (1:76; 7:27). We note here that authoritative narrative characters, the angel Gabriel, the Spirit-filled Zacharias and Jesus, always make the link with Malachi.

(2) Luke fills in the Elijah-role of John in a very particular way. He leaves out the element of the clothing that reminds one of Elijah from the Books of Kings. Another aspect that, according to Luke, does not fit the Elijah-role of John, is that of him being someone who comes and restores everything (Mark 9:12; Matthew 17:12). Luke leaves that out too. The Elijah-role in relation to John concentrates exclusively on that of being a forerunner and a preparer of the way of the Lord (1:17–76; 7:27). It is this role that is spoken of in Malachi.

(3) We cannot speak of a general identification of John the Baptist with Elijah. We can only speak of identification when it concerns Elijah as the preparer of the way of the Lord Jesus (cf. Luke 7:24, Malachi 3:1). Together with Öhler, it is perhaps even better to speak of the fulfilment of this Elijah tradition from Malachi.<sup>14</sup>

## Jesus and Elijah

What is the relationship between Jesus and Elijah? Are we perhaps dealing with Elijah redivivus in Jesus? Is he the new Elijah,<sup>15</sup> in the sense that in the person and mission of Jesus the Jewish expectation of the return of Elijah is realised? Does Luke want to show that Jesus is more than Elijah? Or is Luke no more concerned than portraying Jesus through using the Elijah stories?

However, we can only answer the question if it is clear on which textual data we are basing ourselves. First of all, the places in which a direct relation between Jesus and Elijah is made can be considered: 4:25–27, at the 'beginning' of the Galilee section (3:21–9:50), in the scene of Jesus' appearance in the synagogue of Nazareth (4:16–30), where Jesus, when explaining his 'mission statement,' refers to the mission (by God's will) of Elijah and Elisha to vulnerable people outside Israel (4:25–27). With this he indicates that his mission should be seen in the line of these two prophets. In addition, a direct relationship is made in 9:8–19, at the 'end' of the Galilee part. Here Jesus is identified with Elijah twice. The miraculous

---

<sup>13</sup> See Elie Assis, "Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3,22–24," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 207–220, especially 214–215; David M. Miller, "The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgement in the Reception History of Malachi 3," *NTS* 53 (2007): 1–16, esp. 3, n. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Öhler, *Elia in the New Testament*, 82, 83, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Thus P. Dabeck, "«Siehe, es erschienen Moses und Elias» (Mt 17,3)," *Bib* 23 (1942): 175–189; R. Swaeles, "Jésus, nouvel Élie, dans saint Luc," *AsSeig* 69 (1964): 41–66; Paul Hinnebusch, "Jesus, the New Elijah in Saint Luke," *TBT* 31 (1967): 2175–2182; Jean-Daniel Dubois, "La figure d'Élie dans la perspective lucanienne," *RHPR* 53 (1973): 155–176; F. Gils, *Jésus prophète d'après les évangiles synoptiques* (OBL 2; Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1977), 26–27; Joseph G. Kelly, "Lucan Christology and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *JES* 21/4 (1984): 688–708.

feeding (9:10b–17)<sup>16</sup> has no influence on the view of the crowd (9:19). This is shown by the fact that there are no changes in the views on Jesus (compare 9:7–8 with 9:19). However, that is not all. Luke alludes several times to the Elijah-story (in 1–2 Kings and Sir 48:1–11). Among the exegetes, however, there is no uniformity as to where in the Gospel of Luke valid references to the Elijah-story occur.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the references mentioned are very different in character. A number of times, Luke plays with a scene from the Elijah-story, yet another time it is a turn of phrase that reminds one of a turn of phrase from the Elijah-cycle. The following parallels are mentioned:

1. Luke 1:5–7 // 1 Kings 16:29–17:1  
(introduction);
2. Luke 2:45–46 // 2 Kings 2:17  
(three-day search);
3. Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28v.; 11:1; 22:32 // 1 Kings 17:2, 20–22; 18:36v, 42; 19:4, 9–18;  
2 Kings 1:10, 12  
(man of prayer);
4. Luke 4:1–2 // 1 Kings 19:4–8  
(forty days of fasting in the desert);
5. Luke 7:1–10 // 1 Kings 17:1–16  
(rescue of child);
6. Luke 7:11–17 // 1 Kings 17:17–24 // Sir 48:5  
(raising from the dead of a widow's son);
7. Luke 7:18–35 // 1 Kings 22:1–38  
(rejection of the prophet);
8. Luke 8:1–3 // 1 Kings 18  
(people gathered around the prophet);
9. Luke 9:51–19:28 // 2 Kings 2:1–18  
(last journey, preceding the ascension);
10. Luke 9:51; 24:50–51; Acts 1:1–11 // 2 Kings 2:1–18 // Sir 48:9

<sup>16</sup> Nico Riemersma, “Gestild en stil: Samenhang en context van Lucas 9:10–17,” *Coll* 40/1 (2010): 21–38.

<sup>17</sup> The exegetes who point out parallels, are: Dabeck, “Siehe, es erschienen,” 180–189; Swaeles, “Jésus, nouvel Élie,” 57–66; Hinnebusch, “Jesus, the New Elijah,” 2175–2182; Dubois, “La figure d’Élie,” 167–176; Craig A. Evans, “Luke’s Use of the Elijah/Elisha Narratives and the Ethic of Election,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 75–83, especially 77–83; Robert J. Miller, “Elijah, John and Jesus in the Gospel of Luke,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 611–622; Thomas L. Brodie, “Luke–Acts as an Imitation and Emulation of the Elijah and Elisha Narrative,” in *New Views on Luke and Acts* (ed. Earl Richard; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 78–85; Ulrich Kellermann, “Zu den Elia-Motiven in den Himmelfahrtsgeschichten des Lukas,” in *Altes Testament Forschung und Wirkung: Festschrift für Henning Graf Reventlow* (ed. Peter Mommer and Winfried Thiel; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), 123–137; Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, 175–244; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (NTM 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 284–324, 339–345, 351–364, 377–382, 385–401; Christophe Pichon, “Un parallèle entre Jésus, Jean-Baptiste et Élie: Présupposés méthodologiques,” *RSR* 82 (2008): 497–516; Adelbert Denaux, “L’hypocrisie des Pharisiens et le dessein de Dieu: Analyse de Lc., XIII,31–33,” in *Studies in the Gospel of Luke: Structure, Language and Theology* (TThS 4; Berlin: Lit, 2010), 181–222, esp. 214–216; Jaroslav Rindoš, *He of Whom It is Written: John the Baptist and Elijah in Luke* (ÖBS 38; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010); Brodie, “Luke’s Use of the Elijah-Elisha Narrative,” 6–29; Steven E. Harris, “Greater Resurrections and a Greater Ascension: Figural Interpretation of Elijah and Jesus,” *JTI* 13/1 (2019), 21–35; Petr Mareček, “Elijah: His Role and Importance in the Gospel of Luke,” *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 12/1 (2020): 51–70, esp. 52–53.

- (the ascension);
11. Luke 9:54–55 // 2 Kings 1:9–18 // Sir 48:3  
(request for a consuming fire to come down from heaven);
  12. Luke 9:61–62 // 1 Kings 19:19–21  
(wanting to say goodbye to family members before following);
  13. Luke 10:4 // 2 Kings 4:29  
(do not greet anyone on the way);<sup>18</sup>
  14. Luke 12:24 // 1 Kings 17:1–7  
(ravens supply food);
  15. Luke 12:49–53 // 1 Kings 18:38 and 2 Kings 1:9–14 // Sir 48:1  
(prophet/man of fire);
  16. Luke 12:54–56 // 1 Kings 18:44  
(the cloud as a sign of rain);
  17. Luke 13:31–35 // 1 Kings 19  
(slaying of the prophets, threat, go, tomorrow);
  18. Luke 22:29–30 // 1 Kings 18:31  
(forging/restoring unity);
  19. Luke 22:37–38 // 1 Kings 19:4  
(‘It is enough’);
  20. Luke 22:39–46 // 1 Kings 19:4–8  
(doubt and weakness, mission of the angel,<sup>19</sup> overcoming the situation and yielding to the will of God);
  21. Luke 23:2 // 1 Kings 18:17  
(destruction of the people);
  22. Luke 23:45 // 2 Kings 2:12  
(the tearing - of the veil of the temple at Jesus’ death, respectively of his clothes by Elisha at Elijah’s ascension);
  23. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4 // 2 Kings 2:4,6,9  
(the command to remain at the place of destination);
  24. Luke 24:49 // 2 Kings 2:13  
(being clothed);
  25. Acts 1:9.11 // 2 Kings 2:12  
(no longer seeing the one who sails into heaven);
  26. Acts 5:1–11 // 1 Kings 20:1–21; 21:1–29  
(greed);
  27. Acts 6:9–14 // 1 Kings 21:8–13  
(accusation and stoning).

Not every similarity mentioned is equally convincing. This is especially true for parallels 4, 7, 8, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 25. They are too unspecific and too much focused on a single word or phrase. Sometimes the relationship can even be called speculative, such as the tearing of the veil of the temple and the tearing of the cloak by Elisha. Far-fetched is also the similarity

---

<sup>18</sup> Miller, “Elijah, John and Jesus,” 613, ‘... echo 2 Kings 4.29, where Elijah speaks similarly to one of his disciples. Problematic about the parallelism is that in 2 Kings 4.29, it is not Elijah, but Elisha who is speaking.’

<sup>19</sup> In several – including important – manuscripts (Ɱ<sup>75</sup> Ɱ<sup>1</sup> A B N T W 579. 1071\*. l 844 pc f sys sa bopt), verses 43–44 are missing.

between Luke 22:38 and 1 Kings 19:4, where there is no more than a minimal similarity in the use of words (the same root *ικαν-*): *ικανόν ἐστιν // ικανούσθω*. Among the ‘far-fetched,’ we also reckon a number of parallels mentioned by Thomas Brodie (1:7, 8, 25, 26).<sup>20</sup> Brodie suffers from parallellomania.

There is a strong case for limiting the parallels, first of all to those places where there are characteristic literary similarities between the stories of Elijah (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2) and the Gospel of Luke. Similarities that consist only of a single word or word combination such as ‘forty days’ (4), ‘ravens’ (14), ‘fire’ (15), ‘cloud’ (16), ‘tears’ (22) are less appropriate.<sup>21</sup> When we consider the remaining parallels, we can distinguish between parallel phrasings and parallel scenes. To the first category we reckon the following parallels: 2,<sup>22</sup> 17<sup>23</sup> and 21. The second category includes the parallels 6, 10, 23, 24, 25 and 11.

We do not have the space to study all the parallels in detail, so we will limit ourselves to the second category: the parallel scenes (Luke 7:11–17; 9:51–56; Acts 1:1–11).

### *Luke 7:11–17*

With reference to 7:11–17, there is hardly an interpreter who does not refer to the story of the raising of the dead young man, the son of a widow, by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17–24).<sup>24</sup> Both stories are about the raising of the dead son of a widow, by Jesus and Elijah respectively. Luke includes a number of specific elements from the Septuagint of 1 Kings 17:7–24 (‘going to,’ ‘gate of the city,’ ‘widow,’ ‘son,’ a statement about [the identity of] the miracle worker) besides the less characteristic phrases ‘and behold’ and ‘and it came to pass.’<sup>25</sup> The most significant similarity becomes clear from a look at LXX 1 Kings 17:23 and Luke 7:15. In Luke 7:15, we are dealing with a literal quotation, which Luke does not make explicit. It is only the reader familiar with 1 Kings 17:17–24 who can recognise it.<sup>26</sup> The identification of Jesus with Elijah in the Gospel of Luke is the greatest here, because Luke says exactly the same about Jesus as was said earlier in 1 Kings 17 about Elijah: ‘and he gave him to his mother’ (7:15 cf. 9:42). It is remarkable that Luke repeats the story from Kings here, but does not mention the name Elijah; there are exegetes who state that ‘a great prophet’ (7:16b) refers to Elijah.<sup>27</sup> Does this (no mentioning) perhaps have to do with Luke’s view that Jesus is not a second Elijah, but that he is more than Elijah? Luke finally calls Jesus ‘Lord,’ and at the end

---

<sup>20</sup> Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament*, 284–289, 312–324, 339–345, 385–390 en 391–401.

<sup>21</sup> For comments on 14, 15 en 16 see Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, 229–230.

<sup>22</sup> A comparison between the two texts shows a considerable difference. While in 2 Kings 2:17 the fifty men search for three days, but do not find Elijah, in Luke 2:44–46 the opposite occurs: after three days of searching, the parents of Jesus find him. Finally, I note that the situations (losing a child on the way, resp. ascension) are very different. In the margin of NA<sup>28</sup>, at Luke 2:44–46, there is no reference to 2 Kings 2:17.

<sup>23</sup> A comparison between the two texts does show a difference: in 1 Kings 19:1 Ahab speaks of killing the prophets in Samaria, while in Luke 13:34 Jesus speaks of Jerusalem as the city that kills the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> See also the outer margin of NA<sup>28</sup> at Luke 7:11v: ‘1Rg 17:9s’ and 7:12–16: ‘1Rg 17,17–24’.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas L. Brodie, “Towards Unraveling Luke’s Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7.11–17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17.17–24,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 247–267; Nico Riemersma, *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan: Een exegetisch-hermeneutische studie naar de dodenopwekking in Lucas 7,11–17 in relatie tot 1 Koningen 17,17–24 en Vita Apollonii IV.45* (ACEBTSup 14; Bergambacht: 2VM, 2016), 182–203.

<sup>26</sup> NA<sup>28</sup> does not print Luke 7:15 (καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ) in italics as a quotation, as it does in 9:54 (πῦρ καταβῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἀναλῶσαι αὐτούς).

<sup>27</sup> For my view, the statement ‘A great prophet is risen up among us’ (7:16) refers to the risen and speaking young man (7:15), see Chapter 9 “De dodenopwekking als metafoor (Lucas 7,16),” in Riemersma, *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep*, 116–124.

over the event is spoken as a looking of God after his people (7:16b).<sup>28</sup> The conclusion of my PhD thesis in typological terms was: ‘When it comes to the gift of the son to his mother, then Jesus is typical Elijah. He is atypical when it comes to the resurrection of the dead, antitypical, where it concerns the place where he raises up the dead (Jewish, public territory, pagan, private property) and prototypical, because his actions and speech are reminiscent of God.’<sup>29</sup>

#### *Luke 9:51–56*

It is generally acknowledged that Luke 9:51–56 shows a strong parallelism with LXX 2 Kings 1:1–18.<sup>30</sup> The literary similarities between both texts are: ‘the sending of messengers’ (Luke 9:52 // 2 Kings 1:2), Samaria/Samaritans (Luke 9:52 // 2 Kings 1:1) and ‘the going of the messengers’ (Luke 9:52 // 2 Kings 1:2). The most striking similarity concerns ‘the coming down of fire from heaven to consume people’ (Luke 9:54 // 2 Kings 1:10, 12, 14), a saying that occurs nowhere else in the Tanakh. Does this also support the image of Jesus as the returned Elijah? This seems problematic to me for two reasons:

(1) There is no parallel between Jesus and Elijah. While in 2 Kings 1 Elijah uttered these words, it is not Jesus who repeats them, but two of his disciples, James and John.

(2) While Elijah pleads for fire from heaven to prove that he is a ‘man of God,’ Jesus rejects such a consuming fire.

It must be concluded that Jesus here deviates strongly from Elijah.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Acts 1:1–11*

No less significant is the parallelism between the stories of Jesus’ and Elijah’s ascension (Acts 1:1–11 // 2 Kings 2:1–18).<sup>32</sup> Above I have already mentioned several similarities. First of all, the word ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι, ‘the being taken up (into heaven)’ (Acts 1:11, cf. ἀναλήμψις in Luke 9:51 // 2 Kings 2:9, 10, 11), in addition to the command to remain in the appointed place (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4 // 2 Kings 2:4, 6, 9),<sup>33</sup> ‘the no longer seeing the one who ascended to heaven’ by those present (Acts 1:9.11 // 2 Kings 2:12) and ‘the being clothed’ (Acts 24:49 // 2 Kings 2:13). However, we are dealing here with thematic rather than literary similarities.

Actually, the only literal similarity between both ascension stories is the verb ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι (which occurs three times [vv. 9, 10, 11] in 2 Kings 2 and once [v. 11] in

---

<sup>28</sup> For an extensive analysis of the way in which Luke incorporated 1 Kings 17:7–24 in Luke 7:11–17, see Riemersma, *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan*, 182–203.

<sup>29</sup> Riemersma, *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan*, 201.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas L. Brodie, “The Departure for Jerusalem (Luke 9,51–56) as a Rhetorical Imitation of Elijah’s Departure for the Jordan (2 Kings 1,1–2,6),” *Bib 70* (1989): 96–109; Adelbert Denaux, “The Use of Scripture in Luke 9:51–56,” in *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J. J. Menken* (ed. Bart J. Koet et al.; NovTSup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 57–79.

<sup>31</sup> Contra Jeremy D. Otten, “The Bad Samaritans: The Elijah Motif in Luke 9.51–56,” *JSNT* 42/3 (2020): 375–389, especially 376, who states that Luke 9:51–56 presents Jesus as very much like Elijah.

<sup>32</sup> Arie W. Zwiep, *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology* (NovTSup 87; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 194, calls 2 Kings 2:1–18 ‘Luke’s primary source of inspiration.’

<sup>33</sup> Between both statements, however, there is a difference in orientation. In Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4 it is about staying (waiting) in view of the fulfilment of the promise of being ‘clothed with the power from on high’, in 2 Kings 2 it is about Elijah going alone, without Elisha, to the Jordan.



Acts 1).<sup>34</sup> It may be clear: ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι is an important similarity, yet there is also a substantial difference. First of all, Elijah is more in line with Enoch (Genesis 5:24); both did not die, but were immediately taken up to heaven, whereas Jesus died on the cross (and raised from the dead) before ascending. Jesus' ascension can be seen as the completion of the resurrection. A second point is that in both stories there is a relation between the ascension and the giving of the spirit to the successor(s) of the one who ascends into heaven (Elijah to Elisha; Jesus to the apostles), but there is also a difference. In 2 Kings 2 the two elements of ascension and of the giving of the spirit are part of one and the same event, whereas in Acts 1 and 2 these two events take place at different times. A third point of difference concerns the successor(s). In 2 Kings 2 there is only one successor, in Acts 2 the group is much larger.

It is clear that both ascension stories have similarities, but also differences. Is that what Luke wants? To make clear that Jesus is different from Elijah?

The following conclusions can be drawn from these data:

(1) A study of the relationship between Jesus and Elijah shows that Luke, in describing this relationship, always refers to the Elijah-figure of the Books of Kings (and Sir), and nowhere to the Elijah-figure of the Book of Malachi.<sup>35</sup>

(2) It is especially the opening and closing stories of the Elijah-cycle (1 Kings 17:7–16 + 17:17–24, resp. 2 Kings 1–2) that Luke alludes to in his Gospel.

(3) The connection between Jesus and Elijah occurs at crucial points in the Gospel of Luke: at the beginning (4:25–27) and the end (9:8, 19) of sequence IIa and at the beginning (9:51–56) and the end (24:50–53) of sequence IIb (respectively the beginning of the second book [Acts 1:1–11]). It must be noted that the name Elijah in relation to Jesus only occurs in sequence IIa (3:21–9:50). It is always – with one exception (9:30) – the story characters who mention the name Elijah. Jesus mentions Elijah's name once. He does so during his appearance in the synagogue of Nazareth when he explains his mission. At the end of the first sequence, it is people from amongst the crowds who see Elijah in Jesus. This is not to be dismissed immediately as an incorrect conception of Jesus. In fact, the Gospel itself gives them food for this thought.<sup>36</sup> In Jesus' action they perceive the attention given by Elijah and Elisha to the most vulnerable outsiders. A significant example of this is the raising from the dead of an only son of a widow. Luke repeats here the story from 1 Kings 17:17–24. The identification of Jesus with Elijah is the greatest when Luke says exactly the same about Jesus (7:15, cf. 9:42) as is said about Elijah in 1 Kings 17:23: 'and he gave him to his mother.' In sequence IIb (9:51–24:53), the name Elijah does not occur. May the reader take this as a signal that Jesus, in the path he takes here, *does not* resemble Elijah? That Jesus differs from Elijah, becomes clear in yet another way. Right at the beginning of sequence IIb Jesus rejects the idea of fire coming down from heaven as a means of showing who he is. Jesus chooses a

---

<sup>34</sup> Other wordings also occur: ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν in Luke 24:5, ἐπήρθη in Acts 1:9 and πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν in 1:10.

<sup>35</sup> Contra Miller, "Elijah, John and Jesus," 612 (n. 2). 615, who – with Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 472 – holds ἔρχεται in 3:16 (as in Mark 1:7) to be an allusion to Mal 3:1; John the Baptist would here be attributing to Jesus the eschatological role of Elijah. The context of this verse, however, rather suggests that this ἔρχεται should be read in connection with 3:15, the coming of the Χριστός. Besides, a single word (ἔρχεται) also seems too little for the view that we are dealing here with an allusion to Mal 3:1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. John A. Darr, *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization* (JSNTSup 163; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 165–166; Huddleston, "What Would Elijah," 268, n. 9, 279, n. 54; Nico Riemersma, "Tussen horen en zien: Opvattingen over Jezus in Lucas 9,7–9," *Coll* 42/1 (2012): 84–101, especially 91–96.

completely different way.

(1) With regard to the way Luke speaks about Jesus in relation to Elijah, the exegete cannot come to an unambiguous conclusion, for example that in the Gospel of Luke Jesus is the new Elijah. Sometimes Jesus resembles Elijah, but at other times he acts differently. In his miracles regarding vulnerable outsiders, Jesus strongly reminds one of Elijah (first part),<sup>37</sup> but in his suffering he is completely different from him (second part). Is it perhaps for this reason that Luke has no reference to Elijah in the crucifixion scene (in contrast to Mark, see 15:35)?

(2) The final conclusion we must draw is that Luke does not portray Jesus as an Elijah, but rather uses the Elijah-figure from the Books of Kings to demonstrate that Jesus in his own way stands in that Old Testament prophetic tradition.

## John the Baptist-Elijah and Jesus-Elijah

Elijah is associated with two persons in the Gospel of Luke. Apparently, both figures, John and Jesus, have something of Elijah that associates them with this figure from the Old Testament. It may regard an Old Testament figure, but it is relevant in this context to point out that Elijah appears in various text-units: in 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2 and in Malachi. We saw that Luke, when he speaks about John in relation to Elijah (1:17, 76; 7:27), connects him with the Elijah from the Book of the *prophet* Malachi (Mal. 3:1, 22–24). When the name Elijah appears in relation to Jesus, Luke connects Jesus with Elijah from the Books of *Kings*.<sup>38</sup> That fits in perfectly with the dominant image in which Luke portrays both figures at the beginning of the Gospel; the one as prophet and the other as (a prophetic) king.<sup>39</sup> But it is also to be noted that the identification of John the Baptist with the Elijah from Malachi is greater than that of Jesus with the Elijah from the Books of Kings. By connecting both John the Baptist and Jesus with Elijah, the parallelism between the two at the beginning of the Gospel takes shape in yet another way. It shows how closely John and Jesus are connected.<sup>40</sup>

## Bibliography

- Assis, Elie, “Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3,22–24,” *ZAW* 123 (2011): 207–220.
- Blumenthal, Christian, “Elija bei Lukas,” *BZ N.F.* 61 (2017): 86–103.
- Brodie, Thomas L., “Towards Unraveling Luke’s Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7.11–17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17.17–24,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 247–267.
- Brodie, Thomas L., “The Departure for Jerusalem (Luke 9,51–56) as a Rhetorical Imitation of Elijah’s Departure for the Jordan (2 Kings 1,1–2,6),” *Bib* 70 (1989): 96–109.

---

<sup>37</sup> See also Otten, “The Bad Samaritans,” 378, 380, 381, 385.

<sup>38</sup> J. Severino Croatto, “Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 451–465; Miller, “The Messenger, the Lord,” 3, 16.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 2 “De structuur van de ouverture (Lucas 1–2),” in Riemersma, *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep*, 37–49.

<sup>40</sup> For the parallelism between John and Jesus, see Chapter 11 “Johannes de Doper in het Lucasevangelie,” in Riemersma, *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep*, 136–155, especially 147–155.

\* I owe thanks to drs. Maurits J. Sinninghe Damsté for his correction of the English translation of this article.

- Brodie, Thomas L., "Luke–Acts as an Imitation and Emulation of the Elijah and Elisha Narrative," in Richard, Earl, Eds. *New Views on Luke and Acts*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990, 78–85.
- Brodie, Thomas L., *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000.
- Brodie, Thomas L., *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings*. NTM I. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006.
- Brodie, Thomas L., "Luke's Use of the Elijah–Elisha Narrative," in Kloppenborg, John S., and Joseph Verheyden, Eds. *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative in the Composition of Luke*. LNTS CDXCIII. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 6–29.
- Conzelmann, Hans, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas*. BHT XVII. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977.
- Croatto, J. Severino, "Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts," *JBL* 124 (2005): 451–465.
- Dabek, P., "«Siehe, es erschienen Moses und Elias» (Mt 17,3)," *Bib* 23 (1942): 175–189.
- Denaux, Adelbert, "L'hypocrisie des Phariséens et le dessein de Dieu: Analyse de *Lc.*, XIII,31–33," in *Studies in the Gospel of Luke: Structure, Language and Theology*. TThS IV. Berlin: Lit, 2010, 181–222.
- Denaux, Adelbert, "The Use of Scripture in Luke 9:51–56," in Koet, Bart J., Steve Moyise and Joseph Verheyden, Eds. *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J.J. Menken*. SNT 148. Leiden: Brill, 2013, 57–79.
- Dubois, Jean-Daniel, "La figure d'Élie dans la perspective lucanienne," *RHPR* 53 (1973): 155–176.
- Darr, John A., *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization*. JSNTSup CLXIII. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998.
- Evans, Craig A., "Luke's Use of the Elijah/Elisha Narratives and the Ethic of Election," *JBL* 106 (1987): 75–83.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*. AB XXVIII. New York: Doubleday, 1981.
- Gils, Félix, *Jésus prophète d'après les évangiles synoptiques*. OBL II; Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1977.
- Harris, Steven E., "Greater Resurrections and a Greater Ascension: Figural Interpretation of Elijah and Jesus," *JTI* 13 (2019): 21–35.
- Hinnebusch, Paul, "Jesus, the New Elijah in Saint Luke," *TBT* 31 (1967): 2175–2182.
- Huddleston, Jonathan, "What Would Elijah and Elisha Do? Internarrativity in Luke's Study of Jesus," *JTI* 5 (2011): 265–281.
- Kellermann, Ulrich, "Zu den Elia-Motiven in den Himmelfahrtsgeschichten des Lukas," in Mommer, Peter, and Winfried Thiel, Eds. *Altes Testament Forschung und Wirkung: Festschrift für Henning Graf Reventlow*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994, 123–137.
- Kelly, Joseph G., "Lucan Christology and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *JES* 21/4 (1984): 688–708.
- Koet, Bart J., "Elijah as Reconciler of Father and Son: From 1 Kings 16:34 and Malachi 3:22–24 to Ben Sira 48:1–11 and Luke 1:13–17," in Corley, Jeremy, and Harm van Grol, Eds. *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes*. DCLS VII. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011, 173–190.
- Mareček, Petr, "Elijah: His Role and Importance in the Gospel of Luke," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 12 (2020): 51–70.

- Miller, David M., "The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgement in the Reception History of Malachi 3," *NTS* 53 (2007): 1–16.
- Miller, Robert J., "Elijah, John and Jesus in the Gospel of Luke," *NTS* 34 (1988): 611–622.
- Müller, Christoph G., "Kleidung als Element der Charakterzeichnung im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt: Ein Streifzug durch das lukanische Erzählwerk," *SNTSU* 28 (2003): 187–214.
- Öhler, Markus, *Elia im Neuen Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des alttestamentlichen Propheten im Neuen Testament*. BZNW LXXXVIII. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997.
- Otten, Jeremy D., "The Bad Samaritans: The Elijah Motif in Luke 9.51–56," *JSNT* 42 (2020): 375–389.
- Pichon, Christophe, "Un parallèle entre Jésus, Jean-Baptiste et Élie: Présupposés méthodologiques," *RSR* 82 (2008): 497–516.
- Riemersma, Nico, "Gestild en stil: Samenhang en context van Lucas 9:10–17," *Coll* 40 (2010): 21–38.
- Riemersma, Nico, "Tussen horen en zien: Opvattingen over Jezus in Lucas 9,7–9," *Coll* 42 (2012): 84–101.
- Riemersma, Nico, *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan: Een exegetisch-hermeneutische studie naar de dodenopwekking in Lucas 7,11–17 in relatie tot 1 Koningen 17,17–24 en Vita Apollonii IV.45*. ACEBTSup XIV. Bergambacht: 2VM, 2016.
- Riemersma, Nico, *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, structuur en theologie*. Middelburg: Skandalon, 2018.
- Rindoš, Jaroslav, *He of Whom It is Written: John the Baptist and Elijah in Luke*. ÖBS XXXVIII. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010.
- Swaeles, Romain, "Jésus, nouvel Élie, dans saint Luc," *AsSeig* 69 (1964): 41–66.
- Wink, Walter, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*. SNTSMS VII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Zwiep, Arie W., *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*. NovTSup LXXXVII. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Dit artikel is verschenen in: B.J. Lietaert Peerbolte *et al.* (eds), *Themes and Texts in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honour of Bart J. Koet* (Studies in Theology and Religion, 31), Leiden/Boston 2023, 46-60.