"GOD'S OBEDIENCE": A LINGUISTIC AND NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE HEBREW IDIOM IN 1 KINGS 17:22 AND ITS THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This article explores a particular sentence in the first resurrection narrative of the Bible: "And the LORD obeyed Elijah" (1 Kgs 17:22a). Before the widow's son returns to life, the prophet calls YHWH to perform a miracle. Subsequently, and surprisingly, the narration reports that the LORD *obeyed*. We argue that, in contrast to the Hebrew of the source text, modern Bible translations do not render 1 Kgs 17:22a (וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ) correctly. Instead of translating "The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah" (NRSV), "The LORD heard Elijah's cry" (NIV), or "The LORD answered Elijah's prayer" (GNB), one should instead render the Hebrew valence of שמע by translating "And the LORD obeyed Elijah." We utilize the latest tools for text corpus analysis (Text-Fabric, SHEBANQ)[1] to analyze the Hebrew verbal valence of שמע. Our argument is, however, not only of a linguistic nature. We also engage in a literary analysis of 1 Kgs 17. We seek to demonstrate that when both linguistic and literary studies are combined, the correct rendering of v.22b becomes the theological climax of the opening chapter of the so-called Elijah cycle. This theological climax reveals what Lunn has described as "human-theophany." The prophet embodies YHWH's presence. At the end of our article, we explore the intertextual and typological aspects of such a theological climax.

Keywords: 1 Kgs 17, Elijah cycle, resurrection, valence, typology, intertextuality, narrative studies, linguistics, digital humanities

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[1] This article will refer to queries that have been published with persistent identifiers (PID) on the web. Due to the nature of PIDs no access-date information will be provided. The reader can investigate our published queries with their results when following the PID address (a mouse-click away).

Introduction

With three episodes, 1 Kgs 17 opens the Elijah cycle (1 Kgs 17–19).[2] The chapter stands out from the preceding chapters because of its exceptional literary design and unexpected formulations.[3] One can argue that the climax of this chapter is found in its final episode, when a dead boy is resurrected. It is the first resurrection account of the HB. In addition to Elijah, only his disciple and successor, Elisha, can bring the dead back to life (cf. 2 Kgs 4:32–37, 13:21). The titling of the prophet as "man of God" (v.18: אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים; v.24: אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים) further marks the pivotal character of this episode. Only at the very end of the Elijah cycle (1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 2) will the prophet again be called a "man of God" (2 Kgs 1:9, 11, 12, 13). Through narrative art, this chapter develops the prophet into a dramatis personae. Elijah enjoys a unique relationship with Yahweh, who provides him with unrivaled author-

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[2] Würthwein has argued that the Elijah cycle (1 Kgs 17–19) was composed and inserted by Deuteronomistic circles that were prophetically influenced (DtrP). These circles tried to combine the drought composition (1 Kgs 17–18) with the Horeb composition (1 Kgs 19). According to Würthwein, however, the linking of these two compositions, lacks coherence and necessity ("doch es fehlt an einem 'ursprünglichen und notwendigen Zusammenhang'"). After at least two Deuteronomistic redactions, a post post-Deuteronomistic redaction added the material of the resurrection of the boy (1 Kgs 7:17–24). He argues that the secondary nature of the latter is recognizable because (1) the unspecific formula "now it happened after these things" (וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה) connects only loosely with the former episode about the Sidonite widow; (2) the woman in vv.8–16 is a poor widow (v.10: אַלְמָנָה), while the woman in vv.17–24 is a wealthy head of a household (v.17: בַּעֲלַת הַבַּיִת), possessing a larger house with a second floor. According to Würthwein, the post-Deuteronomistic redactors tried to connect these two women as being one and the same person only at a later stage of the narration (after v.10—it is v.20 that uses אַלְמָנָה again). The redaction, therefore, did not merge the two independent episodes perfectly. See Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1. Kön. 17–2. Kön. 25*, eds. Otto Kaiser and Lothar Perlitt, ATD 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 205, 222, 226–227. The argument for a secondary insertion of 1 Kgs 17:17–24 is also accepted by Rendtorff. See Rolf Rendtorff, *Das Alte Testament: Eine Einführung*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001). Interestingly, the apparent incoherencies are not recognized or commented on by Waltke. See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 717. Our research results, however, should raise questions about Würthwein's take. As we suggest, there is a well-crafted command-and-compliance pattern contained in the entire chapter. This pattern is developed in such a way that a climax is reached in v.22. This article seeks to demonstrate that one can achieve such a climax only if one can build upon the episode of the poor widow in vv.8–16 with its own command-and-compliance structure.

[3] This article will explore some of those literary features and formulations. Particularly, the command-and-compliance pattern and awkward formulations like כִּי אִם־לְפִי דְבָרִי (v.1) and וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ (v.22) will receive attention.

ity. This finds its ultimate climax when the narration reports in v.22a, "And YHWH obeyed Elijah" (וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ).

Only a few scholars have taken note of this particular use of language in v.22a. Although Jesse C. Long and Jerome Walsh have pointed at this surprising formulation in their commentaries on 1 Kings, they do not elaborate on the interpretative implications of God's "obedience" in the context of the interplay between YHWH and Elijah in ch. 17.[4] However, a precise translation triggers two questions: (a) In what sense can God be obedient to a human being? and (b) What are the theological implications of such a use of language? To address both questions, this article will (1) frame the general literary context of 1 Kgs 17, and (2) analyze the valence of שמע to establish a proper rendering for the construction of שמע + בְּקוֹל. After the linguistic analysis, this article will (3) show how God's "obedience" is part of the chapter's literary "command-and-compliance" pattern. Finally, (4) we will explore how far the formulation in v.22a invites theological reflections upon the God-man relationship.

General Outline of the Literary Context

1 Kings 17 contains three narrative blocks that all take place in the context of a severe drought. This drought is announced in the opening of the chapter (1 Kgs 17:1). The first two blocks have several similarities by which the third block is offset. Herewith, the third episode achieves a climactic level and contributes surprising theological insights.

After the uncommon introduction of the Elijah cycle in 1 Kgs 17:1, each of the three narrative blocks is introduced by a—typical for the genre— וַיְהִי clause (vv.2, 8, 17). In the first episode (1 Kgs 17:2–7), the prophet retreats to Wadi Cherith, where ravens care (כול [v.4]) for him. In the second episode (1 Kgs 17:8–16), he moves to Zarephath, where he is cared for (כול [v.9]) by a Sidonian widow (אַלְמָנָה). In both cases, he follows the directions of YHWH. The *Wortereignisformel* (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו [vv.2, 8]) introduces each episode. The third and final narrative block (1 Kgs 17:17–24) is about the death of the widow's son and his resurrection and is introduced by וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה.

This third episode differs from the previous two in narratively significant ways. In contrast to the last two blocks, the *Wortereignisformel* (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה

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[4] Jerome T. Walsh affirms, "The phrase 'to listen to the voice' of someone is the usual idiom in Hebrew for 'to obey,' and it is often translated that way when the subject is a human being (for example, 1 Kgs 20:36)" (*1 Kings,* Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996], 235). In his turn, Jesse C. Long says that "in an important statement for the larger story, the narrator says that the Lord hears Elijah's cry (literally, 'heard/obeyed Elijah's voice' [קוֹל, *qôl*])." Such statements are, however, the exception. Long highlights the parallel with Josh 10:14, where the phrase appears in connection with Joshua (*1 & 2 Kings,* College Press NIV Commentary [Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002], 208).

אֵלָיו) is absent, and with it, divine promises and guidance. But from a lexical perspective, a similar sounding opening clause is provided:

Table 1. Narrative clause openings in 1 Kgs 17

First episode (v.2)	וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו
Second episode (v.8)	וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו
Third episode (v.17)	וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

However, through the similarities, the differences shine: again, there are "word(s)" (דְּבָרִים/דְּבַר, vv.2, 17). This time, however, they are not YHWH's words but just the narrated—that is, "worded"—events (הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה). The prophet finds himself no longer grounded in a word from YHWH. He now stands simply on the grounds of past events ("worded" history). The situation is challenging because he must manage without divine instructions. While YHWH saves the prophet from hunger and death at Cherith (first episode) and in Zarephath (second episode), he now must take care of the premature death of a boy in the absence of a word from YHWH.

Here follows the next contrast: while the prophet has been the object of care in each episode (v.4: ravens take care [כול] of him; v.9: the widow takes care [כול] of him), he is now called to become a caretaker himself—he is to care for the vanishing life of the widow's child. The absence of the verb כול in this third episode is apparent. It reappears in the next episode of 1 Kgs 18, where Obadiah is taking care (כול) of hundred prophets he is hiding from Jezebel (cf. 1 Kgs 18:4, 13). This verb contributes significantly to the textual coherence of the Elijah cycle.[5]

Finally, the first two episodes emphasize the prophet's obedience to YHWH's command (cf. vv. 3–5, 9–10).[6] However, in the third episode, it is the prophet who commands YHWH, "Return now the life of the boy!" (תָּשָׁב נָא נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה, v.21). In response, YHWH fulfills Elijah's request in v.22b: "And he returned the life of the boy" (וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד). The reverse

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[5] One could claim that in all instances where כול appears, it is the servants of YHWH who are being cared for. While ravens, a widow, or the servant Obadiah guarantee the survival of the prophet, the prophet is never portrayed as a caring agent. Rather, the narrator develops the prophetic persona of Elijah as the one who can control the laws of nature simply by the words of his mouth (cf. 1 Kgs 17:1).

[6] The divine command לֵךְ (v.3) is followed by Elijah's obedient action: וַיֵּלֶךְ (v.5a). The prophet's obedience is explicitly emphasized by the narrator with the complementary clause "he did according to the word of YHWH" (וַיַּעַשׂ כִּדְבַר יְהוָה, v.5b). In the second episode, the divine command קוּם לֵךְ צָרְפַתָה (v.9a) is followed by another obedient action by the prophet: וַיָּקָם ׀ וַיֵּלֶךְ צָרְפַתָה (v.10a).

of the commanding pattern with the additional reverse of the obedience pattern is emphasized with the surprising and puzzling formulation of the opening clause of v.22a: וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ. As we will argue below, a literal translation would render, "And God obeyed Elijah." The narrative climax, then, is complete. The role of servant and Lord appear to be reversed: the hierarchy between the divine and human agents has flipped. If such a reading is justified, it invites us to explore the God-man relationship in the context of theophanies.

YHWH Obeys His Prophet: Valence Analysis of שמע + בְּקוֹל

The verb שמע appears in the HB 1168 times[7] and is represented by four different stems. Both *CDCH* and *HALOT* list renderings for שמע that vary between "to hear," "to listen to," "to pay attention," "to obey," "to understand," "to be heard," "to be obedient," "to summon," "to cause to hear," and "to make known."[8] What meaning is activated depends on two significant factors: *stem* and *valence*.[9] While comprehensive dictionaries provide information about the relationship between verbal meaning and verbal stem, they often lack guidance regarding verbal meaning and valence.[10] Thus, while dictionaries are a good starting point for discovering the meaning and scope of שמע, further analysis of its actual valence patterns is needed.

From the perspective of stem distribution, שמע appears most frequently in the qal stem (1051x).[11] The apparent general meaning triggered in the qal is "to hear."[12] For our purpose, we are particularly interested in the functioning of the different meanings that שמע triggers in its qal stem. Our method for exploring verbal meaning has been discussed elsewhere.[13] To get an overview of the different valence patterns of שמע, we will utilize the ETCBC database

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[7] See SHEBANQ query ID2926.

[8] Cf. *CDCH*, 469-470; *HALOT*, 1570–1574.

[9] The valency of a verb refers to the number of complements a verb may select. See Christo H. J. Van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze. *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), §12.3 and §33.2, 58-61, 277-280.

[10] Cf. Janet W. Dyk, Oliver Glanz, and Reinoud Oosting, "Analysing Valence Patterns in Biblical Hebrew: Theoretical Questions and Analytic Frameworks," *JNSL* 1.40 (2014): 43–62; Oliver Glanz, Reinoud Oosting, and Janet W. Dyk, "Valence Patterns in Biblical Hebrew: Classical Philology and Linguistic Patterns," *JNSL* 2.41 (2016): 31–55.

[11] See SHEBANQ query ID2927.

[12] *HALOT* and other dictionaries list "to hear" as the first and most general meaning. Cf. *HALOT*, s.v. "שמע."

[13] See Dyk, Glanz, and Oosting, "Analysing Valence Patterns," 43–62; Glanz, Oosting, and Dyk, "Valence Patterns," 31–55.

and tools like SHEBANQ and Text-Fabric.[14] Querying the ETCBC database will allow us to identify the different valence patterns and detect the distribution statistics that come with them.

In most cases, שמע appears with either an explicit direct object or a complement.[15] However, in 141 of all the שמע cases in qal, שמע does not come with any explicit object or complement.[16] The meaning generated by these constructions is "to hear," and in most cases, the object of hearing is implied.[17]

Where one or more obligatory elements[18] are involved, it does not come as a surprise that in most qal cases, שמע appears with an explicit direct object (447x).[19]

The second strongest valence distribution of שמע is with complements in the form of prepositional phrases (290x).[20] The different constructions can be grouped according to the preposition that forms the head of the phrase and can be paired with the specific meanings they trigger. The table below includes three examples for each pattern:

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[14] A broad and detailed introduction into SHEBANQ can be found at https://github.com/ETCBC/shebanq/wiki. For more advanced linguistic analysis utilizing the latest technical tools for data mining, Text-Fabric has proven to be the go-to tool. The latest news and general information can be found here: http://etcbc.nl/category/text-fabric/.

[15] With a total of 1051 qal cases, 669 cases have שמע with an explicit complement or object. See SHEBANQ query ID2942.

[16] See SHEBANQ query ID2943.

[17] Translations indicate this by adding "of it" or "it" (e.g., Gen 21:26; 2 Sam 10:7; 1 Kgs 8:34).

[18] Obligatory elements are also called complements. Complements are necessary elements that cause a verb to have a specific meaning. See Coulter George, "Verbal Valency," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, ed. Georgios K. Giannakis, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2013). See also John A. Cook, "Valency: The Intersection of Syntax and Semantics," in *Contemporary Examinations of Classical Languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek): Valency, Lexicography, Grammar, and Manuscripts*, eds. Timothy Martin Lewis et al., (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 53–66. Unfortunately, the ETCBC database does not clearly differentiate between its nomenclature syntactical elements (e.g., subject, predicate, object) and valence elements (e.g., core, complement, adjunct). From a valence perspective, the ETCBC categories, objects (i.e., direct objects), complements (i.e., indirect objects), and certain location phrases, are to be considered valence relevant complements.

[19] See SHEBANQ query ID2931. As the query results show, the direct object can either come in the form of an object phrase or an entire object clause.

[20] See SHEBANQ query ID2932 (e.g., Gen 3:17; 16:11; 21:12; 41:15). Indirect objects are tagged as complements in the ETCBC database.

Table 2. Valence patterns of שמע

Group	Pattern	Function and Examples	
A	שמע + אֶל (110x)[21]	triggers the meaning: "to listen to X"	
		וְקָרֵאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עָנְיֵךְ (Gen 16:11)	And you shall call his name Ishmael for YHWH listened to your affliction.
		וַיִּתְעַבֵּר יְהוָה בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלָי (Deut 3:26)	And YHWH was angry with me because of you and thus did not listen to me.
		שִׁמְעוּ אֵלַי יֹדְעֵי צֶדֶק (Isa 51:7)	Listen to me, you who know righteousness!
B	שמע + בְּ (105x)[22] בְּקוֹל + שמע	triggers the meaning: "to obey"	
	שמע + בְּ In all constructions the preposition בְּ governs the noun קוֹל.	עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקּוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי: (Gen 26:5)	because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws
		וְאַתֶּם לֹא־תִכְרְתוּ בְרִית לְיוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִזְבְּחוֹתֵיהֶם תִּתֹּצוּן וְלֹא־שְׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקֹלִי (Judg 2:2)	and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars. But you have not obeyed my voice.
		שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם (1 Sam 8:7)	Obey the voice of the people
C	שמע + לְ (52x)[23]	triggers the meaning: "to pay attention to"[24]	
		וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתֶּךָ (Gen 3:17)	And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife"
		וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי: (Gen 16:2)	And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarai
		וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה (1 Sam 15:1)	now therefore listen to the words of the Lord

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[21] See SHEBANQ query ID2945.

[22] See SHEBANQ query ID2946.

[23] See SHEBANQ query ID2947.

[24] The preposition כְּ also introduces a complement of the verb שמע. But since it

The Problem of God's Obedience in 1 Kgs 17:22a

In light of the distribution of the בְּקוֹל + שמע valence, it appears somewhat awkward when we find a text in which יהוה/אֱלֹהִים obeys the voice of created beings.[25] Usually, human obey the voice of יהוה/אֱלֹהִים.[26] Hence, regarding 1 Kgs 17:22 (B בְּקוֹל A וַיִּשְׁמַע), we would expect יְהֹוָה to be in position B and אֵלִיָהוּ in position A.

The initial clause of v.22a (וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָהוּ) is placed between the command-and-compliance elements mentioned in the previous section. English Bible translations hide the unexpected formulation in their rendering:

Table 3. Rendering of וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָהוּ in English Bible Translations

NKJV, NASB	Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah
ESV, NRSV	And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah
NIV84	The LORD heard Elijah's cry
NET	The LORD answered Elijah's prayer
NLT	The LORD heard Elijah's prayer
JPS	And the LORD hearkened unto the voice of Elijah
KJV	And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah

As discussed in the first part of this article, the problem with these renderings is that, when the preposition בְּ governs the noun קוֹל as the complement of the verb שמע, the meaning triggered is not "to hear" or "to listen to" but "to obey." While the translations render the valence בְּקוֹל + שמע correctly in most other cases, the reason for deviating from their translation strategy is apparent: How can God obey a human being? The same phenomenon happens in Num 21:3, Deut 1:45, Josh 10:14, and Judg 13:9.[27] In all cases,

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occurs only once, there are not enough examples to examine its valence. In Isa 66:8, the construction means simply "to hear." See SHEBANQ query ID2954.

[25] Such a construction can only be found 4x: SHEBANQ query ID2937.

[26] See SHEBANQ query ID2938. Indeed, the great majority of קוֹל construct relationships are established with יהוה/אֱלֹהִים (occurence: 34x). This stands in contrast to a minority of קוֹל construct relationships without יהוה/אֱלֹהִים (occurence: 16x). See SHEBANQ query ID2939. Where קוֹל has a pronominal suffix attached, it usually refers to YHWH as the speaker. See SHEBANQ query ID2940.

[27] Only a few authors have recognized the implications of the obedience formula found in these passages. Commenting on Num 21:3, Baruch A. Levine points out the rarity of this formulation in biblical literature. See Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36:* AB 4A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 85. He also points to Judg 13:9 and 1 Kgs 17:22 as other instances in which the obedience formula (to

the translations follow the same practice and translate the construction as

use his terminology) is used. From the perspective of the canonical order, the first occurrence of the formula appears in Num 21:3. However, from the perspective of the chronology of the story line, Deut 1:45 represents the earliest reference to divine obedience. Recalling Israel's past, Moses reviews the rebellion of the exodus generation in the desert of Paran at Kadesh when they refused to enter the land forty years earlier. He remembers their intention to go up and fight against the Canaanites in an attempt to reverse God's condemnation (Deut 1:41–42). Without God's intervention in their favor, the defeat would have been guaranteed. After a shameful debacle, they cried to Yahweh, but he did "not obey" them (וְלֹא־שָׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקֹלְכֶם - Deut 1:45). It seems evident that the use of the formula here is ironic. In Deuteronomy 1:43, Moses says, "So I spoke to you, but you did not listen (וְלֹא שְׁמַעְתֶּם); you rebelled against the command of Yahweh." As they disobey God, he now "disobeys" them when they ask him to interfere. The reversal of the situation is found in Num 21:3. Now, thirty-eight years after this defeat before the Amorites, Israel is in the same place (note the mention of Hormah in both passages), ready to face the Canaanites from Arad. There are still people from the first generation alive—although they "will not claim the promise themselves, they will begin to see it fulfilled" (Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981], 399). It is significant that the episode marks a turning point in the military fortune of Israel, who from this point on start to overcome in every battle against the Canaanites. It is also important that the episode is literarily arranged after Aaron's death. The exodus generation is almost gone, and God starts to fulfill his plan with the second generation. Thus, God reverts their fortune and "obeys" them, giving them victory over the king of Arad. Such an irony should be understood in light of the covenant. On the one hand, as his people obey God's commands, he also obeys them, granting their request for help. On the other hand, as his people disobey him, he also "disobeys" them, denying his intervention in a circumstance he has not led them to. The use of the obedience formula in Judg 13:9 remains puzzling. The apparent lack of exceptionality in Manoah's request and the subsequent reply from Yahweh here seem to raise the question of whether this idiom reliably corresponds to the gloss "obey." When Judg 13:9 is considered in the context of the other passages where the obedience formula appears, the exceptional character of the occurrence becomes more evident. There are three coincidences common to all these passages where divine obedience is found. First, all of them appear in the Deuteronomist history. Second, all of them are related somehow to a battle against a power antagonistic to God (Amorites—Deut 1:45; Canaanites from Arad—Num 21:3; Amorites—Josh 10:13; Philistines—Judg 13:9; Baal—1 Kgs 17:22). Finally, and more important, all these passages involve a messianic figure (Israel, Joshua, Samson, and Elijah). On the development of messianic overtones involving Samson, see Matthew J. Grey, "'The Redeemer to Arise from the House of Dan': Samson, Apocalypticism, and Messianic Hopes in Late Antique Galilee," *JSJ* 44 (2013): 553–589. As these characters relive the history of Israel, their typological function is established. See G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 21–22. Regarding the use of the obedience formula in Josh 10:13, the exceptional nature of the circumstance is obvious. In his commentary on Josh 10:13, Paul Hinlicky remarks that "an exchange of idioms or attributes, indeed of subjectivities, occurred in this singularity: as YHWH

"the Lord heard," "listened to," "heeded," "hearkened," and so forth. One exception is the NET Bible translating the expression in Josh 10:14 with the correct nuance: "The LORD obeyed a man." As seen in the table, NET Bible translators were not consistent, for they translated the same expression differently in Josh 10:14 and 1 Kgs 17:22.

The struggle to render the expression seems to date back to the Septuagint (LXX). As a whole, the Greek version of 1 Kgs 17 presents few deviations from the MT.[28] In the face of the general textual agreement between the LXX and the MT, the change in v.22 is significant.

Table 4. MT-LXX comparison

	MT	LXX
cl1	וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ	
cl2	וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד עַל־קִרְבּוֹ	καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως, καὶ ἀνεβόησεν τὸ παιδάριον
cl3	וַיֶּחִי:	

The LXX does not render the critical first clause (cl1) but adds between cl1 and cl2 καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως ("and it happened thus"). After Elijah's command in v.21, the LXX states that what the prophet commanded took place

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fought for Israel, YHWH became the servant, listening to and obeying the human voice of Joshua, who acted as Lord in commanding heavenly bodies" (*Joshua*, BTCOT [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical, 2021], 155). The way the LXX translators render these passages suggests that the valence triggers the obedience formula in each case. Joshua 10:14 (ἐπακοῦσαι θεὸν ἀνθρώπου) and Judg 13:9 (καὶ ἐπήκουσεν ὁ θεὸς τῆς φωνῆς Μανωε) use the word ἐπακούω, which means (according to BDAG) "to obey" or "to pay close attention to what one is told w. implication of being responsive." The other two cases, Num 21:3 (εἰσήκουσεν κύριος τῆς φωνῆς Ισραηλ) and Deut 1:45 (καὶ οὐκ εἰσήκουσεν κύριος τῆς φωνῆς ὑμῶν), use the construction εἰσακούω + φωνῆς. Again, the basic meaning BDAG suggests is "to obey" or "to listen, with implication of heeding and responding." Throughout the LXX, most of the cases of ἐπακούω and εἰσακούω have human beings as subjects that obey (or are called to obey) YHWH.

[28] Except v.22, the most significant is the change from the singular to the plural of לִבְנֵךְ (in Greek τοῖς τέκνοις σου) in vv.13 and 15 (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς instead of וּבֵיתָה). Such a change may be an attempt to harmonize "her household" and "your son." Provided is a list of all of the deviations: v.1 LXX adds τῶν δυνάμεων ὁ θεὸς; v.13 LXX = τοῖς τέκνοις σου, MT = וְלִבְנֵךְ; v.15 LXX = τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, MT = וּבֵיתָה; v.17 LXX = πνεῦμα, MT = נְשָׁמָה (see Gen 2:7); v.20 LXX = ὁ μάρτυς, MT = עַל; v.21 LXX = ἐνεφύσησεν, MT = וַיִּתְמֹדֵד; v.22 LXX = καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως, καὶ ἀνεβόησεν τὸ παιδάριον; MT= וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד עַל־קִרְבּוֹ וַיֶּחִי; v.23 LXX does not have וַיִּקַּח אֵלִיָּהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד.

without the explicit involvement of YHWH. Only the second clause (cl2) loosely follows the Hebrew and is rendered καὶ ἀνεβόησεν τὸ παιδάριον ("and the lad cried out"). Although no conclusive argument may be drawn from this, for we may be dealing with a different *Vorlage*,[29] it is not impossible to assume that the LXX translator struggled with an obedient God.[30]

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[29] Unfortunately, none of the published DSS material covers the text of 1 Kgs 17. The forming of any solid hypothesis is, therefore, impossible.

[30] The LXX could have translated the Hebrew valence with ἐπακούω ("to obey") as it did in Josh 10:14 (ὥστε ἐπακοῦσαι θεὸν ἀνθρώπου / "as God obeyed a human being"). The LXX renders the Hebrew valence שמע + בְּקוֹל ninety-one times by using different constructions. The constructions can be categorized as follows: (a) The majority of the cases offer a formalistic translation that reproduces the Hebrew valence in the form of a Hebraism: ἀκούω τῆς φωνῆς (49), εἰσακούω τῆς φωνῆς (25), ὑπακούω φωνὴν (6), ὑπακούω φωνῆς (3), ἐπακούω τῆς φωνῆς (3). That the Hebrew valence is understood to trigger the meaning "to obey" is evident when considering the context of the ἀκούω τῆς φωνῆς passages and when taking into account that the chosen verbs have the basic meaning of "to obey" (εἰσακούω, ὑπακούω, ἐπακούω), "to follow instruction" (ὑπακούω), "to pay close attention to what one is told with implication of being responsive" (ἐπακούω), or "to listen, with implication of heeding and responding" (εἰσακούω) (see BDAG). (b) In only three cases, the LXX uses ἀκούω without the accusative or genitive form of φωνή. In these cases, ἀκούω is followed by a genitive form that functions as a syntactical object (Gen 27:8; Exod 18:19; 1 Sam 8:19). For example, ἄκουσόν μου (2x in the imperative form: "Listen to me!"). In all these three cases, either a command is issued, or a disobedience/rejection is described. BDAG confirms that ἀκούω followed by a genitive form can trigger the meaning "to heed." (c) In Josh 5:6, the Hebrew לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה is rendered as οἱ ἀπειθήσαντες τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ("the ones disobeying the laws of God"), again confirming that the LXX understands the Hebrew valence שמע + בְּקוֹל to have the meaning "to obey." (d) In one case, ἐπακούω is used without carrying over the Hebrew בְּקוֹל into the Greek (Josh 22:2). As shown above, however, ἐπακούω has as its basic meaning "to obey" or "to pay close attention to what one is told with implication of being responsive" and is, therefore, a good functional translation of the Hebrew valence שמע + בְּקוֹל. (e) The final variant for rendering the שמע + בְּקוֹל is the one-time use of εἰσακούω followed by a genitive pronoun that functions as an object (Exod 23:21). As shown above, the default meaning of εἰσακούω is "to obey" or "to listen, with implication of heeding and responding." A detailed look at each of the cases above shows that the majority of constructions have a human being or a people group as a subject, with θεός or κύριος functioning as the object of obedience. In this way, it resembles the use of שמע + בְּקוֹל in the HB. It is, however, noteworthy that in the Psalms, κύριος is called (κύριε!) to "obey" or "to listen with the implication of heeding" to the prayer of the poet (Pss 6:9; 26:7; 27:6; 63:2; 114:1; 129:2). It then seems that figures like Joshua and Elijah encourage the praying poet to believe that God could indeed "obey" the voice of a mere mortal, since YHWH has shown himself willing to follow the instructions of Joshua and Elijah.

Instead of translating וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ ("and God obeyed Elijah"), he preferred a more generic rendering in Greek: καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως ("and it happened thus").[31]

A similar phenomenon occurs in the Targum of 1 Kgs 17, which translates v.22a as וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ ("and the Lord received the prayer of Elijah"). It is possible to conjecture that the translator was again trying to avoid the theological problem of an obedient God. A detailed examination of the valence of שמע in the equivalent texts in the LXX and the Targumin could confirm this possibility.

In any case, the modern translations' failure to communicate the nuance of the Hebrew text overshadows the narrative strategy in 1 Kgs 17:22. While one should suggest a more precise translation, one is simultaneously confronted with the challenge of how to understand divine obedience.

However, we take the narrator's use of this specific שמע valence to be functioning as an additional means to express an interplay between YHWH and Elijah. Only as part of this overall narrative strategy can the meaning of 1 Kgs 17:22 be appreciated.

God's Obedience as Part of the Literary Strategy

The Referent of "My Word" (17:1)

The reversal of roles is not only hinted at in this third episode. Already, the beginning of the chapter opens the door for assuming that Elijah has YHWH-like authority.

Elijah appears abruptly in the scene after mentioning Ahab's sins in 1 Kgs 16:29–34. Elijah's narrative interrupts the sequence of kingly successions, providing "a pause to consider the *prophetic counterforce* in Israel's life."[32]

Different from what Patterson and Austel have named "Elijah's call,"[33] there is no call at all. Elijah is not even introduced as a prophet or man of God; only his geographical and ethnic origin are mentioned briefly.[34] There-

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[31] A detailed study on the relationship between the Masoretic Text and the LXX of 1 Kgs 17–19 is provided by Phillipe Hugo (Philippe Hugo, *Les deux visages d'Elie, texte massorétique et Septante dans l'histoire la plus ancienne du texte de 1 Rois 17–18* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006); Philippe Hugo, "Text and Literary History: Case of 1 Kgs 19," in *Soundings Kings: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, eds. Mark Leuchter and Klaus-Peter Adam (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 15–34.

[32] Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 207. Emphasis in the original.

[33] Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Kings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 770.

[34] There is no agreement on the meaning of תִּשְׁבִּי in v.1. On the discussion about the origin of Elijah, see Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, ApOTC (Downers Grove, IL:

fore, only by considering Ahab's sins in the backdrop can the reader under-
stand that Elijah is a prophet announcing judgment against the king. Elijah's
proclamation of the draught in v.1 is not presented as a divine oracle or speech
(in contrast to vv.2, 8). Hee-Sook Bae puts it this way: "Elijah's proclamation
of the drought…is not attributed to YHWH, but rather to Elijah."[35] And
Walsh notes that "in view of the bold claims Elijah makes in this verse, the
narrator's silence about his religious authority is striking."[36]

Although Elijah is characterized as following God's direction later in
the narrative, the initial lack of prophetic authorization creates confusion
regarding the source of authority in Elijah's oath. Is he speaking for himself
or for God? Since only God can prevent the pouring down of dew or rain
(טַל וּמָטָר), the text blurs the distinction between Elijah's and God's voice.
The blurring of identities continues with the use of the phrase כִּי אִם־לְפִי דְבָרִי
("except at my word").[37] In 1 Kgs 17:1, this clause complements the sense of
the oath by establishing the condition by which the land will see rain or dew
again—namely, לְפִי דְבָרִי.

A literal rendering of the prepositional phrase פִי דְבָרִי would be "the
mouth of my word." A search for the phenomenon through the HB shows that
outside of 1 Kgs 17:1, the phrase containing פֶּה in construct with דְּבָר appears
only in the Pentateuch (Gen 43:7; Exod 34:24; Deut 17:10).[38] Although the
expression may be considered typical for the Pentateuch, its occurrence in
1 Kgs 17:1 is unique.[39] Still, the use of the expression in 1 Kgs 17:1 seems to

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InterVarsity, 2014), 231; Patterson and Austel, "1, 2 Kings," 771; Mordecai Cogan,
1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB10 (New York,
NY: Doubleday, 2001), 425; Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 210–211.

[35] Hee-Sook Bae, "Elijah's Magic in the Drought Narrative: Form and Function,"
BN 169 (2016): 13.

[36] Walsh, *1 Kings*, 226.

[37] Most of nominal clauses opened by כִּי אִם are found in the Deuteronomistic
literature (including Jeremiah), with a major concentration in the Former Prophets.
See Text-Fabric query results in section "Conditional Clause Opening of Nominal
Clauses" of our jupyter notebook: https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH. Conditional verbal clauses
are well distributed over the entire HB.

[38] See Text-Fabric query results in section "For the Mouth of My Word: An
Exceptional Formulation" of our jupyter notebook: https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH. The
formulation appears awkward. One would expect the reverse word order, resulting
in "the words of [my|the] mouth." One would think that words belong to a mouth
rather than a mouth to words. The expression "the words of [my|the] mouth" is well
testified in the HB corpus. The phrase containing דְּבָר in construct with פֶּה can be
found frequently (cf. 1 Kgs 17:24; Ps 36:4; Prov 18:4; Jer 5:14; 9:19; etc.).

[39] In this passage, the noun פִי is determined by the 1sgC pronominal suffix, while
in the Pentateuch, the noun is determined by the article (e.g., פִּי הַדָּבָר in Deut 17:10).

build on an idiomatic expression that appears frequently in the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic history, triggering the meaning "measure of X." [40] If this is the case, the best rendering of this phrase would be "by the measure of my word." Consequently, we suggest that Elijah claims that the effectiveness of his words is closely connected to the authority of his mouth. [41] Elijah's mouth, then, can cause a drought and reverse it as well.

Lastly, an additional point to be considered here is the referent of the 1sgC pronominal suffix in דְבָרִי. It is interesting that apart from the poetic literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs), the 1sgC pronominal suffix attached to דְּבָר always has God as its referent. [42] Thus, the use of the expression itself may indicate some blurring of identity between YHWH and the prophet. But it is the lack of a previous indication of divine discourse that makes the use of דְבָרִי here striking. Since the referent here is Elijah and the word involves the shutting down of the sky, preventing dew or rain, we wonder how the prophet could say it only on his initiative. And if he is just quoting God's words or

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Furthermore, while in the Pentateuch the noun is governed by the proposition עַל, it is governed be the preposition לְ in 1 Kgs 17:1.

[40] Idioms are regularly built by having the preposition לְ governing the noun פֶּה as part of a construction relation (e.g., "mouth of the sword," Num 21:24, Josh 6:21). Often it carries the meaning of "measure" or "amount" ("the amount that goes through your mouth"). For example, "And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat (אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלֹו) you shall make your count for the lamb" (Exod 12:4 ESV). The meaning of "measure"/"amount"/"proportion" is also present in constructions with שָׁנָה, as in Lev 25:16 (KJV): "According to the multitude of years (לְפִי רֹב הַשָּׁנִים) thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years (וּלְפִי מְעֹט הַשָּׁנִים) thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee." See the complete data retrieval in the Text-Fabric query result section "For the Mouth of my Word: The Idiomatic Background to the Formulation" in our jupyter notebook (https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH).

[41] While the UBS handbook on *1 & 2 Kings* provides no arguments for their translation advice, our analysis (the idiomatic background to the לְפִי דְבָרִי construction) supports their suggestion:

> **Except by my word** is literally "except at the mouth of my word." This may be rendered in a variety of ways in different languages. Some will prefer to say "unless I command it" (NCV) or "except as I give orders" (Mft). Others may prefer "until the time when I give permission." (Paul Clarke et al., eds., *A Handbook on 1 & 2 Kings*, 2 vols., United Bible Societies' Handbooks [New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 2008], 1:520)

[42] The only exceptions are Judg 11:35, Neh 6:12, and 1 Kgs 17:1. The construction appears fifty-seven times in fifty-six verses throughout the HB. If Job, Psalms. and Proverbs are disregarded, thirty-five out of thirty-eight times, God is the referent of the suffix. For the entire distribution of "my word," see Text-Fabric query result-section "My Word": https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH.

conveying his will (as the rest of history indicates), why does the text not make it clear?

As can be seen, the omission of any divine directive to Elijah in v.1 creates an ambiguity between God's and Elijah's voice. On the one hand, the ambiguity leaves the reader wondering whether Elijah is speaking for himself. The answer is given in the rest of the story, and it becomes very clear in the widow's speech in v.24: דְבַר־יְהוָה בְּפִיךָ אֱמֶת (the word of the Lord that is in your mouth is truth). On the other hand, the blurring between God and Elijah's acts signals the special relationship that the prophet has with YHWH. The word of Elijah is no less than the word of God itself.

Imitation through the Command-and-Compliance Pattern

Further support for the existence of an interplay between YHWH and Elijah is the command-and-compliance pattern. Command-and-compliance designs the phenomenon where the imperative meets its fulfillment in the *wayyiqtol* of the same root. Through this literary device,[43] the narrator reveals the quality of his character's obedience. The use of this pattern is summarized in the table below:

Table 5. Comand-and-Compliance in the Kerith Valley and in Zarephath

In the Kerith Valley		In Zarephath	
God's command	Elijah's compliance	Elijah's command	Widow's compliance
לֵךְ מִזֶּה (v.3: Leave here)	וַיֵּלֶךְ (v.4: and he went)	קְחִי (v.10: take)	וַתֵּלֶךְ לָקַחַת (v.11: she went to take)
קוּם לֵךְ (v.9: Get up, go)	וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ (v.10: and he got up and went)	לִקְחִי (v.11: take)	no compliance
		בֹּאִי עֲשִׂי (v.13: go and do)	וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתַּעֲשֶׂה (v.15: and she went and did)

The command-and-compliance pattern expresses Elijah's strict obedience to God's instructions.[44] This idea is reinforced in v.5 when the narrator concludes וַיַּעַשׂ כִּדְבַר יְהוָה ("and he did according to the word of God") and by the subsequent repetition of וַיֵּלֶךְ.

In the first scene of Zarephath, Elijah issues imperatives while the widow takes the place that belonged to the prophet in the Kerith valley. Thus, there

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[43] Repetition has often been confused with unnecessary repetition.

[44] The repetition is not a naive narrative pleonasm but a way to say that the prophet was completely obedient.

is an imitation of the previous command-and-compliance pattern. Now, however, Elijah is for the widow what God was for him in the first scene.[45]

One peculiar aspect of the widow's compliance is that the pattern is not perfect. She obeys, but her obedience is hesitant. This is particularly visible in what follows v.11a. This hesitancy increases and turns into noncompliance in the third scene (vv.17–24). In the face of a significant crisis, the woman does not obey anymore. Rather, she questions the prophet in v.18 (מַה־לִּי וָלָךְ).[46] In v.19, Elijah commands, תְּנִי־לִי אֶת־בְּנֵךְ (Give me your son!). But instead of וַתִּתְּנֵהוּ ("and she gave him")—what would be expected if the command-and-compliance pattern were to be continued—the narrator adds וַיִּקָּחֵהוּ מֵחֵיקָהּ ("and he took him from her lap"). With this, the narrator subtly points out that she is in "rebellion" against the prophet, for she thinks that his presence somehow caused her son's death.[47] At this point, there is an irony revolving around the use of the verb מות (to die). Through the divine miraculous intervention, the prophet delivers the widow and her son from their imminent death ("we will eat it, and then we die [מות in qal]"). Now, in v.18, the same

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[45] The same compliance-and-command pattern involving Elijah is found in ch. 18. For instance, the pericope of 18:16–40 is dominated by the pattern where Elijah's imperatives always meet with compliance. In 1 Kgs 18:16–40 alone, there are twelve occurrences of the command-and-compliance pattern. They can be found in verses 19, 20, 25–28, 30, 34, 35, and 40. A few instances are in the table:

Imperative—Order		*Wayyiqtol*—Fulfillment	
וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח	And now send! (v.19)	וַיִּשְׁלַח אַחְאָב	Ahab sent (v.20)
וַעֲשׂוּ רִאשֹׁנָה	Do first! (v.25)	וַיַּעֲשׂוּ	They (Baal's prophets) did (v.26)
גְּשׁוּ אֵלַי	Approach to me! (v.30)	וַיִּגְּשׁוּ	They (people) approached (v.30)

Thus, in 1 Kgs 18 Elijah is in charge. First, the king (18:19–20) and then Baal's prophets (vv.25–27) and the people (vv.30, 34–36) submit to Elijah's commands—he is in total control of the situation. While the repetition may sound unnecessary to a modern audience, the narrator is making an important point: as God's representative, Elijah has authority over the king, the people, and even over Baal's prophets.

[46] The expression מַה־לִּי וָלָךְ appears in Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 19:22; 2 Kgs 3:13; and 2 Chr 35:21. The equivalent Greek expression appears in Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; and John 2:4. According to Jones, the question asked is literally, "What have I and you (in common)? Which means why do you interfere in my affairs?" (Gwilym H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*, NCBC 2 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984], 308)

[47] Her accusation can be better understood in light of the ancient Near East thought: "Prophets were often considered dangerous and having one around posed considerable risk. The gods could be harsh taskmasters as often as they could be generous benefactors, and the prophets represented them. Additionally, if the prophet were to become angered or offended at any little thing, he might, in an uncontrolled moment, pronounce some sort of curse that would inevitably come true" (Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000], 377).

woman[48] accuses the prophet of having come to kill her son (מות in hifil).
Elijah himself redirects such an accusation to God in v.20 (לְהָמִית אֶת־בְּנָהּ).

In short, the narration blurs the role of YHWH and Elijah by imitating
the command-and-compliance pattern of the first scene (Elijah obeys God)
in the second scene (the widow obeys Elijah).

Imitation through the Authorized Word

In the first scene, the narrator stresses in v.5 that Elijah acts according to
YHWH's word (וַיַּעַשׂ כִּדְבַר יְהוָה). The expression דְּבַר יְהוָה (the word of the
Lord) functions as an organizing principle in the Elijah cycle. The word of
YHWH dominates every part of 1 Kgs 16:29–2 Kgs 2:11. Brodie recognizes
an "overarching emphasis on the word" by affirming that "the multi-faceted
richness of God's word is perhaps the single most important idea in the
Elijah-Elisha narrative."[49] Such emphasis is in line with the thrust of the book
as a whole.[50]

Textually, the centrality of "the word of the Lord" in 1 Kgs 16:29–2 Kgs
2:11 is manifested through its dense distribution: the expression דְּבַר־יְהוָה

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[48] Some have suggested that the woman in vv.8–16 is different from the boy's
mother in 17–24. The main argument is based on the fact that the woman in the
first scene is about to starve to death, and hence, she seems to be financially deprived.
In her turn, the woman in the second account has a two-story house, which some
have seen as an indication of a better social status. Besides, the woman in the second
narrative is not called "widow" but "owner of the house" (הָאִשָּׁה בַּעֲלַת הַבָּיִת) (v.17).
However, it should be remembered that the woman in the first scene has a household
(v.15), which can imply that there were more people in her home. The text never calls
the boy "her only son." Such a household could include more relatives. In a prolonged
drought, even people who were financially strong could face starvation. In addition to
that, the house mentioned in v.17 seems to be the way in which the narrator links the
story to the characters of v.15, whose household is sustained by the divine miracle. The
prophet identifies the mother of the lad as "the widow with whom I lodge" (הָאַלְמָנָה
אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי מִתְגּוֹרֵר עִמָּהּ, v.20). Therefore, it seems to be clear that the woman in both
scenes is the same individual.

[49] Brodie, Thomas L. *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Inter-
pretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model of the Gospels* (Collegeville, MN:
Liturgical Press, 2000), 70.

[50] Hagan summarizes, "This is a work which emphasizes the inexorability of that
fate by its use of repetitive, stereotypical language and by a continuous demonstra-
tion of the reliability of prophecy…. There is no prophetic figure in Kings (except
those who are intentionally proved false) whose words do not come to pass, either as
predicted or with some degree of reinterpretation. The ideal of prophecy invoked here
is that of Deuteronomy 18:22: true prophecy is that which actually comes about, but
'if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not
spoken'" (G. Michael Hagan, "Chapter 12: First and Second Kings" in *The Complete
Literary Guide to the Bible*. edited by Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III. [Grand
Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010], 147, 161).

appears fifteen times in only eight chapters,[51] becoming a *Leitwort* in this narrative cycle.[52] Bearing in mind the theological importance of דְּבַר יְהוָה, it is significant that in v.15, the narrator uses the slightly altered phrase from v.5: the widow acts according to the word of Elijah (כִּדְבַר אֵלִיָּהוּ). By putting in parallel the same expression and substituting the *postconstructus* YHWY with Elijah, the narrator is playing with the roles of God and his prophet (כִּדְבַר אֵלִיָּהוּ vs. כִּדְבַר יְהוָה). This becomes even more obvious once the distribution of the construction כִּדְבַר יְהוָה is compared with the distribution כִּדְבַר followed by a non-YHWH proper name. In 1 Kgs the כִּדְבַר construction is always followed by YHWH as a proper name.[53] There is only one exception found in 1 Kgs: v.15 (כִּדְבַר אֵלִיָּהוּ). Consequently, the formulation "according to the word of Elijah" breaks with the expected formulation "according to the word of YHWH" and emphasizes the YHWH-like authority of Elijah.[54]

Swapping YHWH's and Elijah's Roles in 1 Kgs 17:21b, 22b

An unexpected alternation of the command-and-compliance pattern can be found in vv.21b–22b.

Table 6. Prophetic command and divine compliance

Elijah's "command"	YHWH's "compliance"
תָּשָׁב נָא נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה עַל־קִרְבּוֹ	וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד עַל־קִרְבּוֹ
"may the life of this boy return to him"	"and the life of the boy returned to him"

An interesting aspect of v.22 is the relationship between תָּשָׁב נָא נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה עַל־קִרְבּוֹ in v.21b and וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ־הַיֶּלֶד עַל־קִרְבּוֹ in v.22b. Since Elijah uses the jussive (תָּשָׁב נָא)[55] instead of the imperative form of שׁוב, his command is

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[51] 1 Kgs 16:34; 17:2, 5, 8, 16, 24; 18:1, 31; 19:9; 21:17, 28; 22:5, 19; 2 Kgs 1:17.

[52] It occurs in different contexts: guidance regarding the prophet's movements: 1 Kgs 17:2; 8; 18:1; the prophet's obedience: 1 Kgs 17:5; fulfillment: 1 Kgs 17:16; widow's affirmation of faith: 1 Kgs 17:24; judgment against Ahab and Jezebel: 1 Kgs 21:17; divine mercy toward Ahab: 1 Kgs 21:28; Jehoshaphat's request: 1 Kgs 22:5; judgment against Ahab: 1 Kgs 22:19, 38.

[53] 1 Kgs 12:24; 13:26; 14:18; 15:29; 16:12, 34; 17:5, 16; 22:38.

[54] See Text-Fabric query results in section "According to the Word of…": https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH.

[55] The LXX also rejects the use of a direct second person imperative and chooses a more indirect third person passive imperative (ἐπιστραφήτω): Κύριε ὁ θεός μου, ἐπιστραφήτω δὴ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ παιδαρίου τούτου εἰς αὐτόν.

indirect and functions much more like a request.[56]

The jussive formulation (תָּשָׁב נָא) is matched perfectly with the subsequent *wayyiqtol* וַתָּשָׁב ("and it returned") in v.22b. In this way, the previous command-and-compliance pattern is resumed, though more softly. A jussive instead of an imperative form is used. That the resumption of command-and-compliance is intended is evident through the use of the בְּקוֹל + שמע valence in v22a: וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ—"And YHWH obeyed Elijah" (see our earlier analysis).[57]

With the interchange of roles, the narrator intentionally plays with the concept of prophetic authority and the prophet's divine partner.

Theological Explorations of a Special God-Man Relationship

The narrator's strategy of establishing an interplay between YHWH and Elijah, as seen above, takes the prophet's relationship with God to a new dimension. We will explore the theological facets of this relationship to better understand 1 Kgs 17:22 and the prophetic status of Elijah in this chapter.

Elijah as an Agent of Creation

The motif of creation and de-creation is vital in 1 Kgs 17. In Gen 1, God speaks, and everything comes to existence. In 1 Kgs 17, God's word put in motion his prophet (vv.2, 8), who acts on God's behalf, promoting sustenance and life. In the same chapter, we find all dimensions of nature obeying God's command, whether inanimate things like the rain (17:1; cf. 18:1) or living creatures like animals (v. 3) and human beings (v.9).

On the other hand, the motif of de-creation is evident in the lack of water over "the face of the earth" (עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה) (v.14, cf. Gen 1:2, 29). Due to the sin of the land's inhabitants, there is a process of de-creation taking place. The lack of food[58] and the death of the boy represent reverses of the

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[56] Elijah does, however, use the imperative form to address YHWH at the Mount Carmel episode in 1 Kgs 18:37 (עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה עֲנֵנִי). The imperatives are also rendered in the LXX (ἐπάκουσόν μου, κύριε, ἐπάκουσόν μου).

[57] The only other episode in the HB in which a man's command or request directed to God is followed with "and God/the LORD obeyed" is the narrative about Samson's birth. There Manoah calls for the Angel of the LORD to return and instruct the parents about their soon to be born son (Judg 13:7–8). See Text-Fabric query results in section "Jussive/Imperative followed by בְּקוֹל + שמע": https://bit.ly/3rIfCMH.

[58] In addition to de-creation overtones, the lack of flour (קֶמַח) and oil (שֶׁמֶן) (v.16) signals the polemic between YHWH and Baal. Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton observe that "grain and oil were two of the major exports of the city of Zarephath. The fact that they were in short supply is an indication of how severe the drought was. They are also two of the most basic commodities for survival. As staple products they represent the major arena where fertility can be observed" (Walton, Matthews,

original Edenic condition. In particular, the combination of נְשָׁמָה (breath) leaving the body of the boy in v.17 and the call for restoring the boy's נֶפֶשׁ (life/soul) in v.21 alludes to the language used in Gen 2:7.

In this context, Elijah is the agent of creation by which God's creative power is transmitted. At the prophet's word, the rain (מָטָר) is withdrawn, disrupting the creation order that will be restored in 1 Kgs 18. Through Elijah, God provides for the widow and her household as he does in Gen 1:29–30. However, it is in the miracle of resuscitation that the evidence of divine creative power climaxes. The text does not leave room for doubt: the boy had died.[59] Hence, we find in this episode the first example of the miracle of resurrection in the Bible.[60] Interestingly enough, resurrections in the HB are performed only by Elijah and Elisha (cf. 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20).[61] Elijah is used by God to realize something unique that only God himself had ever done in the history of humankind.[62]

Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 377).

[59] According to the narrator, the boy's sickness resulted in his death. The expression לֹא־נוֹתְרָה־בּוֹ נְשָׁמָה is used in other contexts to describe actual death (cf. Josh 10:40; 11:11, 14). See also H. Lamberty-Zielinski, "נְשָׁמָה, nešāmā," *TDOT* 10:68. Besides, both the mother and Elijah use the root מות to describe the lad's condition.

[60] The miracle takes place in the upper room of the house. Wray Beal notes that each chapter from 17 to 19 "climaxes with a journey to a high place: an upper room (17); Mount Carmel (18); and the mount of God (19), and it is solved when Elijah descends from the high place" (*1 & 2 Kings*, 230).

[61] Curiously, the three resurrections happen in connection with Elijah and Elisha, which is the same number of resurrections related in the Gospels in connection with Christ: Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:41), the young man of Nain (Luke 7:14), and Lazarus (John 11:38–44). Thomas L. Brodie considers Luke 7:11–17 to be an *imitatio* of 1 Kgs 17:17–24 ("Towards Unravelling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7:11–17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17:17–24," *NTS* 32.2 [1986]: 247-267.

[62] The idea that the boy's resuscitation is an example of a verbal, physical, and ritual magical act, as Bae defends, is not supported by the biblical text (Bae, "Elijah's Magic," 23). In opposition to this view, Nobuyoshi Kiuchi suggests that when Elijah "deliberately pollutes himself by lying on top of the corpse," he is sacrificing himself and, like Moses, is willing "to make himself anathema for the one for whom he prays" ("Elijah's Self-Offering: I Kings 17, 21," *Bib* 75.1 [1994]: 78. In his turn, Andrew R. Davis proposes a new reading of the verb ויתמזז in 1 Kgs 17:21, which, according to him, is not from מדד ("to measure") but from מיד ("to shake"). Then, "in this reading, Elijah's action is neither therapeutic nor magical, it is diagnostic and a necessary step that enables Elijah to formulate a prayer that is specific to the boy's predicament. His revival is not achieved through Elijah's self-measurement or sympathetic magic, rather it is the result of the prophetic word, which has the power to move YHWH to action" ("Rereading I Kings 17:21 in Light of Ancient Medical Texts," *JBL* 135.3 [2016]: 465).

Elijah as a New Joshua

Many scholars have recognized several links between Moses and Elijah. Indeed, the evidence is compelling and suggests that the narrator deems Elijah as a kind of Moses redivivus.[63] However, the intertextual links are not restricted to Moses. The connection between Elijah and Joshua has often been ignored. In 1 Kgs 17, at least three textual indications show a link between the two characters. Elijah is introduced in v.1 immediately after an allusion to Josh 6:26.

Table 7. Josh 6:26 and 1 Kgs 16:34

Josh 6:26 (NRSV)	1 Kgs 16:34 (NRSV)
Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be anyone who tries to build this city— this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!"	In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun.

In Joshua 6:26, Joshua charges the Israelites with an oath, cursing the one who would rebuild the city of Jericho. In 1 Kings 16:34, the narrator announces the fulfillment of the curse during the reign of Ahab, who rebelliously acts against Joshua's charge. Instructively, Paul J. Kissling affirms that

> without any divine directive, Joshua had sworn an oath (men) which laid a divine curse upon anyone rebuilding Jericho (Josh. 6.26).… Significantly, what was originally an unauthorized statement, apparently on Joshua's own initiative, is reported in 1 Kgs 16.34 as, 'the word of Yahweh which he spoke by the hand of Joshua, the son of Nun.'[64]

The same logic is present in Elijah's oath, which is an unauthorized statement based on Elijah's own initiative, from the narrative point of view, even though the narrator reveals it later as the word of God.

The second link is found in v.16. Here the phrase כִּדְבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד אֵלִיָּהוּ (lit. "according to the word of God which he spoke through the hand of Elijah") is the verbatim repetition of the Hebrew at the end of 1 Kgs 16:34: כִּדְבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּן־נוּן. Jesse C. Long remarks that "only Elijah is

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[63] See D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1993), 45; Walsh, *1 Kings*, 284–289; Hagan, "First and Second Kings," 162; Havilah Dharamraj, *Prophet Like Moses: A Narrative-Theological of the Elijah Cycle* (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2011), 218–221.

[64] Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History: Profiles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press: 1996), 114–115.

substituted for Joshua."[65] According to him, "the narrator introduces a Moses/Joshua paradigm that will serve as a construct for reading and interpreting Elijah's story. As Joshua (and Moses) served Yahweh, so Elijah stands in a special place as his representative in Israel."[66]

Finally, the last and perhaps most crucial intertextual link is found in v.22. As seen before, the only other occurrence of the valence שמע + בְּקוֹל with YHWH as subject and a human being as part of the complement בְּקוֹל phrase is found in Josh 10:14, where the narrator records, "There has not been a day like it before or since. The Lord obeyed a man, for the Lord fought for Israel! (NET)."

This third Joshua-Elijah analogy shows how "the storyteller carefully calls attention to the special relationship Yahweh has with the prophet."[67]

It seems adequate to affirm that the language in v.22 imitates Josh 10:14, forming an intertextual connection between the two characters. From a theological point of view, both Moses/Joshua and Elijah serve as covenant mediators through whom God acts powerfully to carry out his sovereign plan for his people.

Elijah and the Presence of God

Our findings in 1 Kgs 17, combined with the remarkable claim in v.22 that YHWH obeyed the prophet, suggest that the narration assumes a concept in which a prophet—and more generally speaking—a created human being can embody a theophany for the surrounding witnesses. Such a conclusion is similar to what Nicholas P. Lunn has proposed. He argues that Elijah and Elisha are prophetic representations of the divine presence in the Northern Kingdom. According to him, "the books of Kings associate these two prophetic figures with nothing other than the presence of God himself."[68] Being a radical claim, it is surprising that Lunn does not consider the interplay between YHWH and his prophet as recorded in 1 Kgs 17. We suggest that our study affirms what Lunn termed a "'human-theophany' prior to the Gospel account of the Incarnation."[69] Elijah is a concrete representation

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[65] Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 207.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 208.

[68] Nicholas P. Lunn, "Prophetic Representations of the Divine Presence: The Theological Interpretation of the Elijah-Elisha Cycles," *JTI* 9.1 (2015): 50. He defends that "many of the episodes involving Elijah and Elisha include language relating either to the Hebrew sanctuaries, namely, the tabernacle and temple, or to theophanies" ("Prophetic Representations," 49).

[69] Lunn states further, "As God was earlier representatively present in the tabernacle temple, so he was similarly representatively present in Elijah and Elisha, with each serving as the guarantee of his presence among his people" ("Prophetic Representations," 61).

of God to his people. Without access to the sanctuary, the immanent God makes himself present through his prophet in a special, merciful way.

Elijah as a Prophetic Prototype

When we consider the narrative strategy that builds an interplay between YHWH and Elijah in 1 Kgs 17, taking into consideration the language games and surprising formulations (cf. v.22) and their theological implications, it is not difficult to see how Elijah must be received as one of the greatest prophets of Israel. Paul House concludes similarly, "This individual is not just *a* prophet but as time passed came to be considered *the* great prophet, the man who stands as the pattern for other prophets (cf. Mal 3:22–24 [NRSV Mal 4:5–6])."[70]

These insights about Elijah open the way for his reuse in Mal 3:22–24 (MT; 4:5–6 ET) and his typological interpretation found in the New Testament. In the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:16), the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, would fulfill his mission.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the valance of שמע and to explore the literary strategies of 1 Kgs 17 in order to understand the narrative report in v.22a: "And YHWH obeyed Elijah." Our study sought to demonstrate that most English Bible translations are inconsistent in translating וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל אֵלִיָּהוּ as "and the Lord heard the voice of Elijah" instead of "the Lord obeyed Elijah." Although the Hebrew text creates an initial theological conundrum, the failure to transmit the original nuance of the Hebrew impoverishes the reader regarding the original meaning of the text. Modern readers should have access to the actual idiom that triggers the meaning "to obey," for otherwise, they miss the theological climax in the narrative. Rather than preventing the Hebrew from shining through, modern translations should allow readers the chance to ponder the meaning of God's obedience in the literary context of the passage.

The language choice in v.22 connects Elijah directly with Joshua (see section "Elijah as a New Joshua"). As the new Joshua, Elijah is the covenant mediator. His oath predicting the drought and the problems resulting from it (v.1) was already foretold by God in the curses on disobedience in Lev 26:19b, 26 and Deut 28:23–24. In this sense, even though there is no mention of an oracle from the Lord, his initial oath is based on "the vengeance of the covenant" (Lev 26:25).

Another interesting theological implication of the command-and-compliance interplay between YHWH and his prophet concerns Elijah's role.

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[70] House, Paul R. *1, 2 Kings: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. TNAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1995), 209.

He represents God's presence to a people who did not have regular access to the sanctuary. The ministry of Elijah is a significant manifestation of God's grace given through his presence. Finally, all these theological implications invite the reader to see the HB prophetic prototype par excellence in Elijah. This can also explain why Elijah's ministry transcends the functions of the Former Prophets and becomes the paradigm for the forerunner of the Messiah in the NT.

It is interesting that despite Elijah's prowess and his interplay with God in 1 Kgs 17, James remarks that his "nature [is] like ours" (Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθὴς ἡμῖν) at the end of his epistle (Jas 5:17). It is true that throughout the Elijah cycle, the prophet is portrayed as a champion of the true religion, whose powerful ministry overcame several difficulties, culminating in his ascension to heaven. However, at the same time, he is portrayed in a very human way with weaknesses and personal struggles. Such a picture inspires us to pursue God's calling even in the face of our frailties. It is only by God's grace that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas 5:16–17).

CALL FOR ARTICLES ON TRUTH AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Andrews University Seminary Studies plans to publish a special issue of our journal on **Truth and Information Warfare**. The importance of this subject may be briefly introduced. First, the Bible records Pilate's question to Jesus, two thousand years ago, concerning "What is truth?". Second, currently, there is growing discussion of the data, information, knowledge, and wisdom pyramid—highlighting the need to balance the gathering of information with transformation (personal, social, political, theological, etc.). Third, the issues of truth and transformation are complicated by the reality of information warfare—defined as the intentional deceptive manipulation of information.

In response to these issues, we invite you to submit articles from various disciplinary perspectives, such as Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, Christian Ethics, Christian Ministry, and Missiology. Articles written by scholars from non-theological disciplines will also be considered for publication if they are suitable for the AUSS venue. You are invited to share studies in connection with, but not limited to, the following areas:

- Perspectives on the relations of truth, information, and power within biblical, theological, and non-theological academic disciplines;
- The history of attitudes toward and responses to truth and information warfare in different religions and different regions of the world;
- Truth and information warfare as illuminated by different biblical genres such as: history, narrative, prophetic, wisdom, psalms, legal, apocalyptic, gospels, parables, epistles;
- Sources for understanding truth and information warfare, such as: Scripture, tradition, experience, reason, science, theology, history, etc;
- Studies on truth and information warfare in relation to the biblical and theological theme of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, Christ and Satan;
- Studies on truth and information warfare in relation to the concept of God's two books—Scripture and nature—and in relation to theological method and scientific method;
- Religious and theologically relevant studies on the relations of the elements of the pyramid of data, information, knowledge and wisdom.

Interested scholars may submit queries or abstracts to auss@andrews.edu for editorial feedback before writing a full article. Completed articles are to be submitted to www.andrews.edu/auss via the "Submit Manuscript" link in the sidebar. **Please indicate in your cover letter that your article is in response to the "Call for Articles on Truth and Information warfare." Articles must be received by July 31, 2022.**

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