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Elijah

His Role and Importance in the Gospel of Luke

Petr Mareček

Elijah is one of the favourite Old Testament characters in the New Testament. After Moses (80 times), Abraham (73 times), and David (59 times) Elijah is the most frequently mentioned Old Testament figure in the New Testament (29 times). He was active in Northern Israel from around the middle of the 9th cen. B.C. and his activity is narrated in the stories of 1 Kgs 17–19; 21 and 2 Kgs 1–2¹. Elijah enjoyed great appreciation in early Jewish literature². Primarily, the people of Israel venerated him as a heavenly intercessor because of his mysterious disappearance from this world into heaven (2 Kgs 2:1.11 and Sir 48:9)³. Furthermore, he was held in great esteem, for, according to Mal 3:23–24, Elijah was a prophetic messenger connected with the eschatological Day of the Lord⁴. However, Malachi's prophecy in 3:23–24 does not require the expectations of Elijah in person, because the likewise articulated prophecies of the future David (e.g. Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:24; 37:24; Hos 3:5) distinctly relate to a David-like figure, not to David in person⁵. The story of Elijah has been recalled repeatedly in the Jewish tradition because of its spectacular content (cf. 1 Macc 2:58; 1 Enoch 89:52; 93:8; ApZeph 9:4–5). Josephus Flavius recounts this story in the most extensive way (*Ant.* 8,319–9,185; *Bell.* 4,460). In the *Lives of the*

¹ In addition to this prophet, three other bearers of this name appear in the Old Testament: 1) A Benjaminite, who is recorded among the clan chiefs in the Benjaminite genealogy provided by the Chronicler (1 Chr 8:27). 2) A priest, the son of Harim, who appears in the list of those who returned from the exile (Ezra 10:21). 3) A son of Elam, who is also listed among those who returned from the exile (10:26).

² See e.g. ZELLER, Elija.

³ Cf. STRACK – BILLERBECK, *Kommentar*, 765–779.

⁴ JEREMIAS, Ἡλ(ε)ίας; LAMBRECHT, Ἡλίας.

⁵ See RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 31–32.

Prophets (Vitae Prophetarum) additional legends are told about Elijah (*VitProph* 9:2-3; 10:6; 21:1-3; 22:1-3)⁶.

The New Testament invokes this famous Old Testament prophet in a variety of different contexts. The name Ἠλίας “Elijah”⁷ occurs in the New Testament, as we have already said, 29 times besides the *varia lectio* in Luke 9:54. It appears especially in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 9 times; Mark 9 times; Luke 7 times), but also in John 1:21.25; Rom 11:2 and Jas 5:17⁸.

Our study will focus on the character of Elijah in the Gospel of Luke, in which he is mentioned by name 7 times in total (1:17; 4:25.26; 9:8.19.30.33). Of all the Old Testament figures mentioned by Luke, Elijah is not the one referred to most times⁹, but he does play an important role in this Gospel. In examining this topic, one must also consider the numerous allusions to the figure of Elijah. In the Gospel of Luke it is possible to find the passages that are designed in a such way that it is reminiscent of a scene from the original Elijah stories (1 Kgs 17–19.21; 2 Kgs 1–2) or which incorporate a phrase that – strong or less strong – is reminiscent of Elijah from 1-2 Kgs or Mal 3:1.23-24. Although there is no final agreement on the number of allusions to Elijah in Luke, these can be considered as generally accepted: 1:76; 7:11-17.18-23.24-27; 9:51.54.61-62. According to some, the list may even be longer.

It has been proposed that the three-day search for the boy Jesus is to be connected with a three-day search for Elijah after he disappeared (Luke 2:45-46; cf. 2 Kgs 2:17)¹⁰. Jesus’ “forty-days” fast in the desert (Luke 4:1-2.10) is sometimes related to 1 Kgs 19:4-8¹¹, but it can be explicated as an allusion to Moses in Exod 34:28 or Deut 9:9. Some scholars see an allusion to Mal 3:1 in Luke 9:52 and

⁶ WIENER, *Elijah*, offers a wealth of material on the prophet Elijah extending from biblical records to contemporary Judaism, embracing also a study of his image in Christianity and Islam.

⁷ The name Elijah (Ἠλίας) has meaning: “Yah(u) is God”.

⁸ Elijah’s high rating in the early church is documented by some Christian writers. Jerome regarded Elijah as “noster princeps” (HIERONYMUS, *Epistola* 58,5 [PL 22, 583]). Tertullian calls Moses “informer populi” and Elijah “reformer populi” (TERTULLIANUS, *Adversus Marcionem* 4,22 [PL 2, 413]).

⁹ Abraham appears 15 times in the Gospel of Luke (1:55.73; 3:8[bis].34; 13:16.28; 16:22.23.24.25.29.30; 19:9; 20:37). David is mentioned 13 times in the Gospel of Luke (1:27.32.69; 2:4.11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38.39; 20:41.42.44). Moses is stated 10 times in the Gospel of Luke (2:22; 5:14; 9:30.33; 16:29.31; 20:28.37; 24:27.44).

¹⁰ Cf. DABECK, *Siehe*, 184.

¹¹ Cf. DUBOIS, *La figure*, 171.

10:1¹², but the expression about sending messengers on ahead can simply remind the reader of 1:17. It can also bring to mind the formulation in Exod 23:20 which is reflected in the combined quotation together with Mal 3:1 in Luke 7:27. In Luke 9:52 and 10:1 the messenger are sent “before his face”, which corresponds with the formulation “before Your face” in Exod 23:20, while the prophecy of Mal 3:1 does not say that the sending is “before Your face”. The mention of the “ravens” in Luke 12:24 has been linked with 1 Kgs 17:1-7¹³, but this view is not convincing. The context is different: the ravens are instruments of God’s providence in 1 Kgs, while in Luke they are presented as its object. Finally “an angel from heaven” who strengthened Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43) is compared by some scholars with an “angel of the Lord” who touched Elijah and told him to eat (1 Kgs 19:5-7)¹⁴. In both events, the angel provides help from God, which is however a common motive in the Bible (cf. Gen 21:14-16).

Two Synoptic Gospels, Mark and Matthew, associate Elijah with John the Baptist¹⁵. Matthew is indeed explicit as it states Jesus’ assessment of John the Baptist: “he is Elijah, the one who is coming” (Matt 11:14)¹⁶. The third Synoptic Gospel, Luke does not connect Elijah only with one story character, unlike Mark and Matthew, but with two: John the Baptist and Jesus.

The purpose of this paper is to offer an interpretation of the texts that are about Elijah in the Gospel of Luke. The detailed exegesis of the texts where he is mentioned either explicitly (1:17; 4:25, 26; 9:8.19.30.33) or implicitly (7:11-16.18-23.24-28; 9:51.54-55.61-62) will help us to outline the main characteristics of the portrait of Elijah and to point out his role and importance in the Gospel of Luke. In this study, we will investigate the way in which Luke gives Elijah

¹² RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 15.

¹³ Cf. DABECK, *Siehe*, 183.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. WINK, *John the Baptist*, 44; DUBOIS, *La figure*, 171.

¹⁵ Scholars have vigorously discussed the question of whether or not there was in the time of Jesus a Jewish expectation that Elijah would come before the Messiah. E.g. FAIERSTEIN, *Why Do the Scribes Say*, and FITZMYER, *More about Elijah*, reject such a Jewish expectation and propose that it may be a Christian invention. On the other hand, e.g. ALLISON, *Elijah*, affirms it. For an overview, see ÖHLER, *Elia*, 1-30.

¹⁶ If we compare the first two synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark), which represent John the Baptist as Elijah, with the Gospel of John, we can notice the difference, since the fourth evangelist presents John the Baptist refusing to identify with Elijah (John 1:21). The testimony of John the Baptist in John 1:21 is influenced by the situation in the Johannine community. The historical John the Baptist might have understood himself as *Elijah redivivus* in his task of proclaiming judgment and salvation. Cf. GNILKA, *Johannesevangelium*, 17.

a place in his story, precisely because of the complex Elijah image in this third Gospel.

1 Elijah – Explicitly Mentioned by Name in the Gospel of Luke

1.1 The Heavenly Message about the Role of the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17)

In the Gospel of Luke, we meet Elijah for the first time in connection with the prediction of the birth of John the Baptist by the angel of the Lord (1:5-25), who announces his greatness (v. 15) and points to the importance of his work (vv. 16-17). The commission of John the Baptist is primarily to bring back “many of Israel’s sons to the Lord their God” (v. 16). In this way, John is inserted into the tradition of great preachers calling for repentance, who urged people to turn away from sin and to return to the Lord (cf. Jer 3:22; 18:11). John’s commission is then depicted as a prophetic mission, which is attributed to Elijah in Mal 3:23 (Luke 1:17). There is no actual quotation here, but an allusion to Old Testament places is made here. According to Mal 3:1.23-24, Elijah is a prophetic messenger who precedes the coming Lord with his judgment and whose task it is to prepare the people before his coming, lest the Lord of the Hosts comes and smites the earth with destruction (cf. Sir 48:10: “to calm the wrath”). Luke does not use some texts of Mark’s Gospel that place John close to Elijah (Mark 1:6 [cf. 2 Kgs 1:8 LXX]; 6:19-29 [cf. 1 Kgs 16:31; 19:10.14]) or identify them (Mark 9:11-13). In saying that “he will go in the spirit and power of Elijah”, it is made clear that John will have the same “prophetic equipment” as Elijah. Luke, probably, wants to state more precisely that John is not Elijah of 1-2 Kgs personally, but in his spirit fulfils the role of Elijah according to Mal 3. It is also clear that in Mark 9:12-13, Jesus’ intention is not to identify John with Elijah of 1-2 Kgs personally. John has his own name, and in Mark 9:4, Elijah appears as a completely different person. So John is not introduced as *Elijah redivivus*, but he is endowed with the same spirit and power as the Elijah of 1-2 Kgs was. He will have two main tasks. The first concerns a disturbed relationship between fathers and their children, which is to be rectified not only by fathers turning to children but by children being equally active (Mal 3:14). The second task is generally expressed as: the conversion of the disobedient. Through a change of hearts and minds, the eschatological people of God has to be prepared for the coming Lord. Although John is seen as the forerunner of God in this way, we can count on the fact that

Luke, in the formulation “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”, thinks of Jesus, whom John precedes. The parallel arrangement of the story of John and Jesus in Luke 1:5–2:52 suggests that John goes before Jesus, who is also called “Lord” (1:43; 2:11). However, this is not explicitly stated here since Zechariah knows nothing about the birth of another child in God’s plan.

1.2 Jesus’ Preaching at Nazareth – the Example from the Scripture about Elijah (Luke 4:25-26)

Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) is the second place where Elijah is mentioned in Luke (4:25-26). By moving this episode, which, according to the Gospel tradition, took place later, shortly before the end of Jesus’ public activity in Galilee (see Mark 6:1-6a; Matt 13:53-58), to the beginning of Jesus’ public activity, Luke gives it a programmatic character. Jesus’ public ministry is not only presented as the fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 4:17-21), but this scene also points to the outcome of his ministry: resistance from God’ chosen people, and salvation offered to the Gentiles (vv. 22-29). In Luke 4:25-26 the mission of Jesus is compared with that of Elijah and the widow of Sarepta (1 Kgs 17:1.8-16), together with that of Elisha and the Syrian Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-14). When comparing 1 Kgs 17 with the wording of Luke we can see that in some cases, Luke updates the language (λιμὸς μέγας / λιμὸς κραταιὰ), while in other cases, exact phrases draw attention to an allusion (εἰς Σαρεπτα τῆς Σιδωνίας). The story of Elijah along with an episode of Elisha are examples from the history of Israel that are given to point out that the work of Jesus will also go beyond Israel and lead to pagans. These examples from the Old Testament provide a justification for the Christian mission to the Gentiles¹⁷. The double term “none” (Luke 4:26.27) in the emphatic position suggests Israel’s rejection (cf. 2:34-35; 3:8-9). Thus, at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, the perspective is of the transition of the gospel to the Gentiles after being rejected by the Jews¹⁸.

¹⁷ TANNERHILL, *The Mission*, 60.

¹⁸ Luke informs us that the early Christian missionary activities always turn first to the Jews (Acts 9:20; 13:5.14.44; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1.10.17; 18:19) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 7–8; 13:46-49; 18,5ff; 19:8-10; 28:23-28).

1.3 Herod's Perplexity (Luke 9:7-9)

Another place in the Gospel of Luke where Elijah is mentioned is the unit 9:7-9, which depicts Herod's reaction to Jesus' reputation, which the evangelist takes over from Mark 6:14-16 (cf. Matt 14:1-2). Jesus' public activity causes people to evaluate his person. The three personalities with whom Jesus is compared all have a prophetic character.

Some people believed that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. The idea of "reviving" John the Baptist presupposes that there had to be some resemblances between John and Jesus. Yet there remains a strange and unexpected popular belief in the "revival" of John and his "reincarnation" in Jesus. In addition, John the Baptist was not known to perform miracles (cf. John 10:41). There was also an opinion among the people about Jesus' activity that Elijah had appeared. Elijah, who was taken to heaven (cf. 2 Kgs 2:1-18), cannot be expected to awaken, but can only be revealed. The prophet Malachi (3:1.23) announces the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord (Sir 48:10)¹⁹. The third group of people explains Jesus' appearance as one of the ancient prophets of the Old Testament period. The expectation of Elijah is witnessed in the time of Jesus (cf. Mark 9:11-12; John 1:21)²⁰; the expectation of Jeremiah or any other prophet is not clearly documented²¹. In Judaism, the resurrection of the dead was expected only at the end of time. In the course of history only those who did not die, i.e., who were taken into heaven (like Enoch, Elijah), could return. It is common to all three popular opinions that Jesus is seen as a prophet from the history of Israel who has returned. For all three it is assumed that only what has happened in the past and what is already known is possible²². However, Jesus is not a person who once existed in the world, but he is an expected person (cf. Luke 9:20; 22:67-67). By joining Jesus with a figure in the history of Israel, Jesus' messianic demand is also undervalued. This is also related to the misconception of the resurrection, which knows nothing of the necessity of previous suffering (9:22.43-44; 18:31-34)²³.

¹⁹ In rabbinic literature, Elijah is portrayed as one who brings pious comfort and salvation in distress and need. Cf. STRACK – BILLERBECK, *Kommentar*, 764-778.

²⁰ JEREMIAS, Ἡλ(ε)ίας, 933-936.

²¹ JEREMIAS, Ἱερεμίας.

²² BOVON, *Lukas*, 464.

²³ SCHÜRMAN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, I, 507-508.

Herod Antipas, who is introduced with the correct title “tetrarch” (in Mark 6:14 he is given the popular designation “king”), responds to these three popular opinions about Jesus with “perplexity” (Luke 9:7). He comments only on the first of these opinions. He considers it impossible for Jesus to be identified with John the Baptist, since he himself had John beheaded. For him, it is out of the question that someone dead can wake up to life. Other assumptions for him are not worth commenting on. But he is also not satisfied with the people’s judgments. He asks about the identity of the man he has heard so much about. His question had been already expressed many times before in the third Gospel (5:21 [scribes and Pharisees]; 7:20 [John’s disciples]; v. 49 [people at the table in the Pharisees’ house]; 8:25 [Jesus’ disciples]). It becomes a crucial question to be answered by Peter’s confession (9:18-20) and by God’s voice from heaven at the event of Jesus’ transfiguration (vv. 28-36). However, Tetrarch Herod is not aware of the fundamental nature of his question. Out of curiosity, he longs to know Jesus. He will get this opportunity in 23:8.

1.4 Peter’s Confession (Luke 9:18-21)

Another place in the Gospel of Luke where Elijah’s name appears is the event of Peter’s confession (9:18-21), which he draws from Mk 8:27-30 (cf. Matt 16:13-20; John 6:67-71) and which appears after the miraculous feeding the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17; cf. Mark 6:30-44). We can observe that Luke does not reproduce the text of Mark 6:45–8:26, which is usually referred to as the “great omission”. By omitting the text of Mark 6:45–8:26, Peter’s confession is closer to both the miracle of feeding the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17) and Herod’s question concerning Jesus’ identity (v. 9). The link between Peter’s confession and the event of feeding the five thousand is evident from John’s Gospel (John 6:1-15 and 6:66-69). People’s opinions about Jesus that Herod had heard about (Luke 9:7-9) appear in the disciples’ statements in v. 19. Jesus is regarded by some people as John the Baptist (without mentioning his resurrection), some people consider him as Elijah (without mentioning his revelation), and some people assume Jesus to be one of the ancient prophets (here is a verbal agreement with the formulation in v. 8). Based on popular evaluation, Jesus is not considered a messianic figure, but is ranked among the prophets. According to the testimony of John’s gospel, Jesus, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, was considered by the people as a prophet whom they intended to come and take him by force to make him king (John 6:14-15). The three opinions of

people already mentioned in Luke 9:7-8 are stated here only in order to highlight the background to Peter's confession. Peter, in the role of the disciples' spokesman, utters a solemn confession that Jesus is God's messiah (v. 20). The title "Christ of God" is not entirely synonymous with the title "Christ" (= Messiah; the Anointed One), with which political expectations were associated. The addition of "God" expresses here, as in 23:35 (cf. 2:11.26), the special relationship of Jesus to God and thus a task that goes beyond human expectations. We can simply say that Peter's confession in 9:20 thus also provides an answer to Herod's inquiry in v. 9.

1.5 Transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:28-36)

The last place in Luke, where the name Elijah appears, is the event of Jesus' transfiguration (9:28-36). Luke presents this event in accordance with his source Mark 9:2-8 immediately after Jesus' instructions on discipleship (cf. also Matt 17:1-8). A peculiarity of Luke's depiction of Jesus' transfiguration is his conversation with two supernatural characters. Luke, unlike Mk 9:4, mentions Moses in the first place before Elijah (also Matt 17:3). In all likelihood, Luke understands the order of "Moses and Elijah" in the sense of the common formulation of "Moses and Prophets" (cf. Luke 16:29-31; 24:27; Acts 26:22)²⁴. Both Moses and Elijah were taken up to heaven according to Jewish tradition. For Elijah this is documented in 2 Kgs 2:11 and Sir 48:9²⁵. Popular belief about Moses developed gradually on this issue, with perhaps the earliest evidence coming from Josephus Flavius (*Ant.* 4,325-326)²⁶. Moses and Elijah appear as heavenly figures ("in glory"; cf. Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10)²⁷. They are presented in conversation with Jesus. The topic of the talk is Jesus' departure from Jerusalem as the fulfilment of the plan of salvation. This "departure" includes not only death (Luke 13:33) but also resurrection and exaltation (9:51). For Luke, "Jerusalem" is not only a city that kills the prophets (13:34), but also a city where the destiny of Jesus and the events set forth in God's plan of salvation are to be accomplished (24:26).

²⁴ SCHÜRMANN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, I, 557; WOLTER, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 352.

²⁵ Cf. 1 Hen 89:52; 93:8; Josephus Flavius, *Ant.* 9,28.

²⁶ Cf. also 2 Bar 59,3nn; *Sipre* Dt 34,5 § 357; *b. Sota* 13b; *Leqach tob* Dt 34,5 § 267b.

²⁷ For other options for interpreting the role of Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration, see PELLEGRINI, *Elia*, 314-320.

2 Allusions to Elijah in the Gospel of Luke

2.1 Zacharias' Prophetic Word about the Task of His Son John (Luke 1:76)

The first allusion to Elijah in Luke can be found in the story of the birth of John the Baptist (1:57-80), when his father Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, in his thanksgiving to God (vv. 68-79) prophesies to his son the task for which he was born. The agreement with the promise of the angel (vv. 16-18) is striking. His newborn son will be called the "prophet of the Most High" (v. 76a). This unique appellation, which does not appear in the Old Testament²⁸, serves to distinguish him from the "Son of the Most High" (v. 32), to whom he will be subordinate. By means of a formulation which comes from the use of Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3, the reader is told that John's task will be to prepare "ways" for "the Lord". These OT phrases were already related to John in the pre-Lucan tradition (see Mark 1:2-3). With the reference to Mal 3:1, Zacharias' prophetic word about the task of his son John is related to the prophecy about the coming of Elijah (cf. Luke 1:17). While the Jewish listener sees John as the forerunner and preparer for the coming of God, the Christian Gospel reader puts connects the title "Lord" with Jesus (cf. Luke 1:43). John's task as a preparer for the Lord is now further clarified, which, according to the angel's announcement, was primarily to convert people, i.e. to change the minds of people (vv. 16-17).

2.2 Jesus Raises the Widow's Son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

The story of the raising of the son of the Nain widow (Luke 7:11-17) is so formed that it resembles the Old Testament stories of the miracles of raising, especially the raising of the son of the widow of Sarepta by Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:8-24²⁹. Jesus comes to the city (Luke 7:11: Nain) as Elijah did (1 Kgs 17:10: Sarepta). He meets the widow (Luke 7:12; 1 Kgs 17:9.10.20) at the city gate (Luke 7:12: ἡ πύλη τῆς πόλεως; 1 Kgs 17:10: ὁ πυλῶν τῆς πόλεως) and the

²⁸ The title "prophet of the Most High" is found in T. Levi 8:15, used of a new king is descended from Levi. This title however does not have a messianic connotation. Cf. FITZMYER, *Luke*, 385.

²⁹ Cf. BRODIE, Luke's Use.

widow's only son is raised from the dead (Luke 7:15; 1 Kgs 17:22)³⁰. An explicit reference to 1 Kgs 17:23 is then made in Luke 7:15 (καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ "and [he] gave him back to his mother"). This phrase is striking when we realize that it is found nowhere else in either testament except in these two accounts. The mention of Jesus as "a great prophet" in Luke 7:16 expresses the popular opinion that Jesus is a great prophet. This is probably a rather vague opinion regarding his identity. The title "great prophet" lacks an article, which does not support his identification with a particular prophet of their expectations. This title may refer to Elijah or one of the other prophets (cf. e.g. 9:8.19). Luke's Gospel repeatedly tells how Jesus is acknowledged as a prophet (cf. 7:39; 9:8, 19; 13:33; 24:19). A prophet like Moses was expected in the last days (cf. Deut 18:15.18; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37) and Elijah was a true prophet in continuity with Moses. Luke himself alludes to the Elijah of 1 Kgs 17. What is he pursuing? He probably wants to show that certain features of Jesus' activity are in accord with God's plan, i.e. that they remind of great prophets of the past like Elijah, as it indeed emerges from Luke 4:26 (in a similar way, Jesus' activity can be compared to Elisha in v. 27). With these allusions, Luke also wants to indicate that Jesus fulfils the expectations associated with the eschatological prophet in the line of Moses, as Elijah was indisputably, and could even take into account the views of those for whom *Elijah redivivus* was a typical Moses-like prophet³¹.

In Luke 7:11-17 Jesus proved himself the one who, like the Elijah of 1 Kgs 17, raises people from the dead. Such a miracle was expected in the Messianic era (cf. e.g. the deeds ascribed to "the Lord" in 4QApocMess 2 ii 1-12)³². This characterization cannot be applied to John the Baptist, about whose therapeutic activity (if any) the Gospel tradition is silent. However, Luke himself does not identify Jesus as Elijah and he never puts him directly into the role of the messenger according to the promise in Mal 3:1 as he does it concerning John the Baptist in Luke 7:27: "this is he of whom it is written", cf. 1:17.76. Luke identifies Jesus as "the Lord" here (7:13; the same is true in v. 19). Luke's procedure is very significant, since v. 13 contains the first occurrence of "the Lord" unambiguously applied to Jesus by the Luke himself. One can also notice the significant difference between the event of Jesus in Nain and the story with

³⁰ In the LXX, the widow has at least two children (1 Kgs 17:12: τοῖς τέκνοις μου), but in the Hebrew, she has only one son (אֶת־בְּרִיָּהּ).

³¹ Cf. RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 169-171, 203-204, 215.

³² Cf. RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 174-176, 210-211, 215.

Elijah in Sarepta, which suggests Jesus' superiority over Elijah. Jesus brings the widow's dead son to life by the command of his mighty word, which means that he raises someone from the dead by his own power, while Elijah had to cry out in prayer to God and bow three times over the child (1 Kgs 17:20-21). It is noteworthy that these details from the Elijah narrative appear in two resuscitation miracles in the Acts of the Apostles: where Peter raises Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) and Paul raises Eutychus (20:7-12)³³.

2.3 John the Baptist's Question and Jesus' Answer (Luke 7:18-23)

The episode about the question of the imprisoned John and Jesus' answer (Luke 7:18-23), is in a shorter form in Matt 11:2-4, which is generally considered to represent the more original "Q" form. In Luke 7:18-23 John the Baptist appears as a questioner who is uncertain about the identity of Jesus. After the message of Jesus' public activity had reached John the Baptist through his disciples, he sends two of them to Jesus with the question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (v. 19). The expression "the one who is to come" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) is used here as a title. This general sounding title probably draws on the announcement of the coming judge in 3:16-17³⁴. This judge recalls the Lord of Mal 3:1 (cf. "behold he is coming" and other allusions in Acts 13:24-25)³⁵ who is coming like fire of Mal 3:1-4.19, cf. Luke 3:9.16-17. Fire in Luke 3:16 is probably judging and saving power of the Holy Spirit and of the word of God, described also by another image in v. 17 (cf. "fire", "wheat" and "chaff" in Jer 23:28-29). Luke himself is convinced that the announcement by the Baptist are to be understood in relation to the Lord: The title "the Lord" (Luke 7:13.19) is the one Luke uses both for Yahweh who is coming and for Jesus. Luke also pays particular attention to be clear and coherent that *the*

³³ When raising Dorcas: "... they took him (Peter) to the room upstairs (ἀνήγαγον εἰς τὸ ὑπερῶον; cf. 1 Kgs 17:19). Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, «Tabitha, get up.» Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up." (Acts 9:39-40). When raising Eutychus: "Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him (cf. 1 Kgs 17:21), he said, «Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.» And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted." (Acts 20:10-12).

³⁴ KREMER, *Lukasevangelium*, 82.

³⁵ Cf. RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 206.

messenger will precede *the Lord*: 1:17.76; 3:4; 7:27. John the Baptist describes this coming Lord in a manner (taking off of sandals) that seems to recall the emblematic passage about Moses (the burning bush) marking the beginning of redemption (cf. Luke 3:16; Acts 13:25 and Exod 3:5; Acts 7:33)³⁶. In fact, Moses is called “redeemer” in Acts 7:35 and the disciples on the way to Emmaus after Jesus’ death had hoped that he was going “to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:19.21). According to Acts 3:24 all the prophets – and John was one of them (Luke 1:76; 7:26; 20:6) – announced the days of a prophet like Moses³⁷. In spite of the fact that the “coming” of various expected figures in pre-Christian Jewish tradition is known³⁸, it is therefore feasible that the title “the one who is to come” in Luke 7:19 refers to the judge Lord (vv. 13.19) of Mal 3:1, who makes his visitation as a Moses-like prophet, redeemer coming with his judging, kindling word of salvation and as the “Messiah” (since John’s announcement is a response to the expectations of the Messiah, Luke 3:15). Jesus does not provide direct answer to John’s question. Instead of accepting or denying that he is “the one who is to come”, he tells the two messengers to report to John what they have witnessed with their own eyes and ears. Jesus’ words summarize the prophecy of Isaiah on salvation, which is to be released from all suffering³⁹. Salvation now comes through Jesus’ words and actions. John’s disciples are not only eyewitnesses of Jesus’ deeds but also witnesses who personally heard his message.

2.4 Jesus’ Witness concerning John the Baptist (Luke 7:24-28)

Jesus’ testimony about John the Baptist in Luke 7:24-28 originates from “Q” and its counterpart is Matt 11:7-11, which has very similar wording. This speech of Jesus, which has a prophetic character, starts with three questions that look back to John’s baptismal activity. They are introduced stereotypically: “What did you go out to see?” The questions, which go back to a time when large crowds of people came to the desert following John (cf. Luke 3:1-20), suggest that John was indeed a prophet (7:24-26a). John was not “a reed swayed by the

³⁶ Cf. RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 131-132.

³⁷ Cf. RINDOŠ, *He of Whom*, 200-201, 204-207.

³⁸ Cf. FITZMYER, *Luke*, 666.

³⁹ Isa 61:1-2 (the proclamation of the good news to the poor, the recovery of sight to the blind); 29:18-19 (the healing of the deaf and the blind, the proclamation of the good news to the poor); 35:5-6 (the healing of the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the mute); 26:19 (the return of the dead to life).

wind” (v. 24)⁴⁰. Here is a reference to his attitude that brought him imprisonment and a violent death (cf. Mark 6:17-29). John was also not a “man dressed in beautiful clothes,” i.e. he did not live the life of a nobleman, but an ascetic life (cf. Mark 1:6). These two characteristics classify him as a great prophet.

What made people journey into the desert was the presence of a prophet (cf. Luke 20:6; Matt 14:5). However, people found “more than a prophet” in the desert. An explanation for this testimony of Jesus about John the Baptist is provided by the mixed quotation of Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, in which the announcement of the coming of the Lord became a declaration from God, coming through the Messiah’s forerunner about the Messiah. In conformity with Luke 1:76, by referring to the text of Mal 3:1, John the Baptist is directly defined by Jesus (Jesus says: “it is he of whom it is written”) as the promised Elijah-like messenger. The significance of John the Baptist, who is “more than a prophet,” is that, as Jesus’ predecessor, he prepared the people for Lord’s coming (cf. Luke 1:17.76; 3:4-6). He prepared the way for the Messiah Jesus, who did not come to bring judgment, but to offer redemption and salvation. Finally, in Luke 7:28, Jesus provides a fundamental explanation for the claim that John the Baptist is “more than a prophet”. John the Baptist is the greatest among all those born of earthly mothers. His greatness does not lie in his personal holiness but in the light of his place in the history of salvation, and in the light of the commission that put him on the threshold of the new era⁴¹. By the words: “the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (v. 28), Jesus is not emphasizing the small importance of John the Baptist, but the greatness of those in the coming Kingdom of God. Neither is he excluding John from the Kingdom. The new age is not comparable to the old one⁴².

2.5 Jesus’ Departure for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)

An important new section of the Gospel of Luke begins at 9:51, the so-called “travel account” (9:51–19:27). Jesus’ public ministry in this section of Luke is marked by his journey to Jerusalem. While this travel account does not explicitly provide an itinerary with precise details of the places visited, it is reiterated through editorial notes that Jesus and his companions are on the way

⁴⁰ The image is found in 1 Kgs 14:15 and is used for Israel.

⁴¹ ROSSÉ, *Luca*, 266. With regard to the place of John the Baptist within the history of salvation, see RINDOŠ, *The Place*.

⁴² SCHNEIDER, *Lukas*, 173.

(e.g. 9:51.52.53.57; 10:1.38; 13:22.33; 14:25; 17:11; 18:31.35). It is, however, only in 19:28 that he will finally reach the outskirts of the city.

In Luke 9:51, with the solemn introductory wording ἐγένετο δὲ “it happened” and the statement about fulfillment points to the fact that a significant event is coming (1:23; Acts 2:1), which is described by the mysterious expression ἀνάλημψις “taking up”⁴³. The Greek word ἀνάλημψις, which appears only here in the New Testament, is derived from the verb ἀναλαμβάνω, which Luke uses in Acts 1:11.22 for Jesus’ ascension (cf. Mark 16:19)⁴⁴. The language recalls those famous OT characters who had not died but had been taken directly up to heaven: Enoch (Gen 5:24 [μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός: God translated him / took him]), Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11 [ἀνελήμφθη: was taken up]) and, according to later tradition, Moses (Josephus Flavius, *Ant.* 4,326 [πρὸς τὸ θεῖον αὐτὸν ἀναχωρήσαι: he went to God]). However, in the Gospel of Luke ἀνάλημψις is a euphemistic reference to the end of Jesus, namely to his death, but it is also a reminder of his glorious resurrection and ascension (cf. Luke 9:22; 18:32-33)⁴⁵. Jerusalem, the place of death for the prophets (13:34), will become the place where Jesus’ journey reaches its destination. It is the place of Jesus’ death (v. 33), but at the same time the site of the resurrection and ascension (24:50-53: Bethany near Jerusalem), and where the missionary work will be based, which will focus on Jews and Gentiles (24:47-49; Acts 1:8).

2.6 Jesus Refuses to Be Identified with the Fiery Reformer (Luke 9:54-55)

The opening episode of the travel account (Luke 9:51–19:27) depicts Jesus setting out for Jerusalem, walking through Samaritan villages, and being refused a welcome in one of them (9:51-56). Just as Jesus’ public activity in Galilee (4:14–9:50) began with a story of rejection (4:16-30), so also “the travel account” (9:51–19:27) is introduced with the story of rejection (9:51-56). In this scene,

⁴³ The Greek word ἀνάλημψις, which appears only here in the New Testament, is derived from the verb ἀναλαμβάνω, which Luke uses in Acts 1:11.22 for Jesus’ ascension (cf. Mark 16:19). It may be understood in this way here, although this term includes the meaning of “death” (2 Bar 46:7; Ps 4:18; *Assumption of Moses* 10,12) and the context implies the idea of death (Luke 9:51b, 55).

⁴⁴ In Luke 24:51 is used the verb ἀναφέρω “to take up” to express ascension.

⁴⁵ WOLTER, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 369.

which has no counterpart in any of the other Gospels, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, make a clear allusion to 2 Kgs 1:10 or v. 12. It is not an exact quotation from the LXX because Luke uses ἀναλῶσαι instead of καταφάγειν in the LXX. The gloss “even as Elijah did” (ὡς καὶ Ἠλίας ἐποίησεν) that is added in some manuscripts (A, C, D, K, W, Γ, Δ, Θ, Ψ, *f*^{1.13}, 33, 565, 700^c, 892 etc. – a not unimpressive list of witnesses)⁴⁶ makes it explicit. The absence of the addition, however, from such early witnesses as *P*^{45, 75}, *κ*, B (cf. also later witnesses as L, *Ξ*, 579, 700*, 1241, *it*^l, *syr*^s, *cop*^{sa, bo}) indicates that it is a gloss originated from some extraneous source, written or oral⁴⁷. Just as the Elijah motif appeared in Luke 4:25-26, so it is also found here (9:54). James and John want to share Jesus’ power to work a punitive miracle. However, Jesus does not accept this request. He rebukes them. Luke used the same sharp expression in connection with the silence commanded after Peter’s confession in 9:21. Jesus does not condemn the opposition of the inhabitants of the Samaritan village. He refuses to act as Elijah (2 Kgs 1) did. The God whom Jesus preaches is not God the avenger. Jesus does not travel to Jerusalem as a judge, but as a Savior⁴⁸. The disciples, who follow Jesus (“Jesus turned to them!” cf. Luke 10:23; 14:25), have to realize that in following him they must count on rejection and persecution.

2.7 The Cost of Following Jesus (Luke 9:61-62)

The last allusion to Elijah in Luke is found in 9:61-62, which is the third saying of Jesus addressed to would-be followers. The first two sayings (9:57-58, 59-60) are derived from “Q”, being found also in Matt 8:19-20, 21-22. The third saying (Luke 9:61-62) which has formally the same arrangement as the previous two, appears only in Luke. While it cannot be said with certainty whether it originates from the source “L” or the extended source “Q”⁴⁹, the influence of the narration on the calling of Elisha is undeniable. Though the text 9:61-62 has only a few phrases and words in common with 1 Kgs 19:19-21 (ἀκολουθέω “to follow”; ἄροτρον “a plough” / ἀροτριᾶω “to plough”; ὀπίσω “back” / ἐξόπισθεν “backwards”), the scene in Luke is similar to 1 Kgs with two elements: 1) the request of Elisha to Elijah: “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and then

⁴⁶ ALAND et al. (eds.), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 223.

⁴⁷ METZGER, *A Textual Commentary*, 124.

⁴⁸ SCHÜRMAN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, II/1, 28.

⁴⁹ Cf. WIEFEL, *Lukas*, 192; ERNST, *Lukas*, 247.

I will follow you” (1 Kgs 19:20); 2) the image of a plough: Elisha was ploughing when Elijah invited him to be a disciple. Unlike Elijah, Jesus permits no delay and neither does he literary toss his mantle over his followers. Elijah permits Elisha to return to his family and kiss them goodbye. Jesus permits no such expression of respect for the family; the kingdom of heaven has drawn near and it is time to take action, now and resolutely. Actually, the statement of Jesus about putting one’s hand to the plough and not looking back may also be related to Elisha. When Elisha returned from Elijah, the text says, he burned the ploughing equipment to cook the oxen. If this is the case, it could be that Jesus is saying to his followers that, like Elisha, they are to burn their bridges to their former lives and not look back as they turn to follow him, just as Elisha followed Elijah⁵⁰. It is possible that Luke 9:61-62 has been added as a comment on vv. 59-60 to make the unprecedented demand contained in Jesus’ answer (v. 60) comprehensible in the post-Paschal situation: the authority of the Lord exceeds that of Elijah. Jesus is not *Elia redivivus*; he is “more than Elijah”. His demands exceed those of the most outstanding representative of the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus makes it clear that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God demands an urgent decision to follow him. He presents the image of a ploughman who can plough straight furrows when he looks forward and does not look back. Ploughing for the kingdom of God will not suffer any distraction. The invitation to discipleship goes beyond family ties and requires a firm, forward-looking view (cf. v. 51).

3 Conclusions

The image of Elijah in the Gospel of Luke is complex. In the episode about the Transfiguration, Elijah appears as an independent story character beside Jesus (Luke 9:30). Therefore, Jesus cannot be *Elias redivivus* of Mal 3:23-23, as assessed by some people (Luke 9:8.19). Jesus rejects the proposal of the disciples, James and John, who expect to act like Elijah and call down fire from heaven to consume the inhospitable Samaritan village (9:54-55; cf. 2 Kgs 1:9-16). John the Baptist is associated several times with Elijah, explicitly in Luke 1:17 (the prediction of the angel Gabriel) and implicitly in v. 76 (the prophecy of Zechariah) as well as in 7:27 where he is, however, directly defined by Jesus

⁵⁰ Cf. BLAIR, Putting One’s Hand.

(Jesus says: “it is he of whom it is written”) as the messenger of Mal 3:1 (the assessment of Jesus). By referring to Mal 3:23-24, the work of John the Baptist is linked to the promised Elijah. On the other hand, Jesus is also depicted with the features of the prophet Elijah. In his preaching at Nazareth, Jesus compares himself with Elijah, whose work transcended the borders of Israel (Luke 4:25-26; cf. 1 Kgs 17:18-16). The account of the resurrection of the widow’s son in Nain resembles the story of the raising of the son of the widow of Sarepta by Elijah (1 Kgs 17:8-24). Finally, Jesus’ action in the scene with the man who spontaneously offers himself as a disciple (Luke 9:61-62) reminds us of the calling of Elisha by Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:19-21. We can sum up that John the Baptist is associated with Elijah, as the forerunner and preparer of the way of the Lord (= Jesus) in the way Malachi speaks (3:1), while Jesus is not associated with the Elijah figure of Malachi, but with the Elijah of the Deuteronomistic cycle 1 Kgs 17 – 2 Kings 2. However, Jesus is not *Elia redivivus*, he is “more than Elijah”, he is the Lord. Jesus brings the widow’s son to life by the command of his mighty word, while Elijah had to call himself in prayer to the Lord and bow three times over the child (1 Kgs 17:20-21). In addition, Jesus’ demands for discipleship (Luke 9:62) exceed those of the most important prophet of the Old Testament (1 Kgs 19:19-21). Jesus is, in accord with Peter’s solemn confession, “the Christ of God”, who does not act as the fiery reformer, but who brings salvation.

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Shrnutí

Tato studie na základě výkladu textů Lukášova evangelia, kde je Eliáš uveden buď výslovně (1,17; 4,25.26; 9,8.19.30.33) nebo implicitně (7,11-16.18-23.24-28; 9,51.54-55.61-62), poukazuje na jeho roli a význam v tomto evangeliu. Obraz Eliáše v Lk je komplexní. Jan Křtitel je několikrát spojen s Eliášem: výslovně v Lk 1,17 (předpověď anděla Gabriela) a implicitně v 1,76 (proroctví Zachariáše) a v 7,27 (hodnocení Ježíše). Na druhou stranu je Ježíš zobrazen také s rysy proroka Eliáše: vystoupení v Nazaretě (4,25-26; srov. 1Kr 17,1.8-16), vzkříšení syna naimské vdovy (Lk 7,11-17; srov. 1Kr 17,8-24), scéna s člověkem, který se spontánně nabízí Ježíšovi za učedníka (Lk 9,61-62; srov. 1Kr 19,19-21). Jan Křtitel je spojen s Eliášem, jako předchůdcem a připravovatelem na Pána (= Ježíše) po způsobu proroctví Mal 3,1.23-24, naproti tomu Ježíš je spojen s Eliášem deuteronomistického cyklu 1Kr 17–2Kr 2. Ježíš však není *Elia redivivus*. On je „více než Eliáš“. On je „Boží Mesiáš“ (Lk 9,20), který nepůsobí jako horlivý reformátor, ale který přináší spásu.

Klíčová slova: Eliáš, Ježíš, Jan Křtitel, Lukášovo evangelium, Starý zákon.

Summary

On the basis of the interpretation of the texts of the Gospel of Luke, where Elijah is mentioned either explicitly (1:17; 4:25.26; 9:8.19.30.33) or implicitly (7:11-16.18-23.24-28; 9:51.54-55.61-62), this study points to its role and importance in this gospel. The image of Elijah in the Gospel of Luke is complex. John the Baptist is associated several times with Elijah: explicitly in Luke 1:17 (the prediction of the angel Gabriel) and implicitly in 1:76 (the prophecy of Zechariah) and in 7:27 (the assessment of Jesus). On the other hand, Jesus is also depicted with the features of the prophet Elijah: Jesus' preaching at Nazareth (4:25-26; cf. 1 Kgs 17:18-16), the raising of the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17; cf. 1 Kgs 17:8-14), the saying of Jesus addressed to would-be followers (Luke 9:61-62; cf. 1 Kgs 19:19-21). John the Baptist is associated with Elijah, as the forerunner and preparer of the way of the Lord (= Jesus) in the way Malachi speaks (3:1), while Jesus is not associated with the Elijah figure of Malachi, but with the Elijah of the Deuteronomistic cycle 1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 2. However,

Jesus is not *Elia redivivus*, he is “more than Elijah”. He is “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20), who does not act as the fiery reformer, but who brings salvation.

Keywords: Elijah, Jesus, John the Baptist, The Gospel of Luke, The Old Testament.

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