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Álvarez Barredo, Miguel

Las Narraciones Sobre Elías Y Eliseo En Los Libros De Los Reyes: Formacion Y Teologia

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As per its title, this is a study of the narratives about Elijah and Elisha in the books of Kings. The narratives are approached from a more or less traditional redaction critical perspective. As per the subtitle of this work, (biblical?) theology is a major and pervading concern throughout the book. These two trends are developed against a reconstruction of the history of the time and the role of Elijah and Elisha that is based on the basically the surface claims advanced in the narratives.

The main body of the book consists of a study of the narrative cycle of Elijah (pp. 7-61) and that of Elisha (pp. 63-117). Each cycle is divided in six narrative units, namely 1 Kgs 17, 18, 19, 21; 2 Kgs 1, 2 for the Elijah cycle and 2 Kgs 3, 4, 5, 6-7, 8:1-5, 13:14-21, for Elisha's. The study follows a clear methodological path: each narrative unit is analyzed first in terms of its possible subunits. The origin and redaction history of these subunits is then discussed. Form critical considerations and emphasis on the presence or absence of deuteronomistic language often characterize these discussions—the dtrG, dtrP and dtrN system is assumed. In several occasions, for the sake of brevity, readers are referred to other studies for a more detailed study of these matters or for additional data (e.g., H. J. Stipp, *Elischa/Propheten/Gottesmäner: die Kompositionsgeschichte des Elischazyklus und verwandter Texte, rekonstruiert auf der Basis von Text-und Literarkritik zu 1 Kon 20.22 und 2 Kon 2-7* [Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 24; St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1987]; E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige 1.Kön.17-2.Kön.25* [ATD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984]). Thematic and linguistic connections within and among units and among units, and among units and

other narratives in the Hebrew Bible are also mentioned in these sections. Then the discussion moves towards what seems to be the main thrust of the book: theological readings of these texts. The study of these two cycles leads to the conclusion chapter of the entire book (pp. 118-23) that deals almost exclusively with theological readings and concerns.

It bears note also that short introductions precede the discussion of each cycle. In the introduction to the Elisha's cycle, for instance, Álvarez Barredo maintains that the Elisha cycle shows concerns that are similar to those of the Elijah cycle at the redactional level and that there are thematic synchronisms that link the two. However, each cycle has its own characteristics. He states that the narratives about the "community of prophets" (2 Kgs 6:2, 12, 21) provide sociological data for the study of these communities. Álvarez Barredo cautions that those who overemphasize the miracles mentioned in the narratives might lose sight of their political aspects. According to Álvarez Barredo, "a prophet anchored in the cultic world is unthinkable; it is for this reason that we find them taking sides and illuminating the history of the elected people with their word, which is divine" (p. 64; reviewer's translation).

The theological readings are strongly informed by (a) a historical reconstruction that defines the period in which Elijah lived as one of religious crisis, as one of severe clash between Yahwism and Baalism, and (b) by the author's construction of the opposition between Baal/Baalism and YHWH/Yahwism. According to Álvarez Barredo this clash involved two very different concepts and evaluations of existence. One is limited and based on self-interest, the other is open to transcendence. One is based on the assumption that humans are self-sufficient, the other leads to trust only YHWH. Álvarez Barredo maintains that Baalism promoted a natural, temporal religiosity based on a concept of deity that is focused on (and restricted to) the present needs and interests of the worshippers. In this world, the religious reality surrenders before present needs and desires, and the "end" becomes an "instrument." In contrast, the God of the Exodus, the God of the Patriarchs communicates a sense of totality. This is the God of history and revelation, so values are not dependent the needs and perspectives of a particular moment. Álvarez Barredo emphasizes that YHWH cannot be manipulated and that salvation cannot be bought, but is given freely.

The paragraph concluding the analysis of 2 Kgs 3 (p. 72) may provide a helpful glimpse at the theological readings advanced in the book. This paragraph may be translated as follows: "The word of the Lord in the person of Elisha coordinates all the sequence of events, expanding its range of action to all and every moment of the military campaign. When one approaches the narrative as a whole, it becomes clear that the divine word instills into it a religious content, thus something that could have been simply neutral is granted a new light that sets it in the horizon of the salvation history. Once again, God acts in favor of his people; the power of his hand becomes visible."

I would leave to the readers of this review to evaluate this salvation history approach and the sharp contrast between YHWH/Yhwism and Baal/Baalism advanced in the book. I would rather conclude my comments with a reference to two other aspects of the work. First, at its best this book reminded me of the flavor of the now classic commentaries by H. W. Wolff on many of the books now included in the Twelve. Yet there have been some changes in the research scene in biblical studies—and in the study of biblical narratives—since Wolff's commentaries. In this regard, the book may seem, at least to some, a bit outdated. Second, Álvarez Barredo is certainly not alone when he grounds his reconstruction of the period on the narrative claims of these stories, or better on his own reading of the surface claims of these narratives. This approach to the writing of the history of ancient Israel, although accepted by some, is contested by others today. The issue is of significance since these historical reconstructions play a role in his theological readings.

To be sure, scholars will find unconvincing many of the claims and arguments advanced in the book if they have serious reservations about the common assumptions and methods of redaction criticism or about its ability to construct original texts, or about the historical reconstruction advanced by Álvarez Barredo. The same holds true for scholars who may take exception to some of his theological readings or the (biblical?) theology that informs them. Still all readers—including these scholars—will be able to find many interesting and helpful comments in this work.