# Elisha and the Children: The Question of Accepting Prophetic Succession

Author(s): Fred E. Woods
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**Abstract:** This article discusses prophetic succession and Elisha's cursing of the young people who mocked him.

# Elisha and the Children: The Question of Accepting Prophetic Succession

Fred E. Woods

The account of Elisha's curse of the forty-two young people and their seemingly unjustified fatal end when attacked by two bears has puzzled Latter-day Saints as well as other students of the Bible. An enlightening solution to this unusual incident, as I argue here, also leads to a clearer view of an important underlying issue: the acceptance or nonacceptance of divinely approved succession among prophetic personalities, in this case Elisha's succession to the prophet Elijah.

Most scholars who have analyzed the problematic passage in which Elisha is called "baldy" or "baldheaded" (*qērēaḥ*) by a group of youths agree that this word should be translated literally (2 Kings 2:23–24). But the issue does not end here. Philological and contextual evidence suggests that the word *qērēaḥ* is being used figuratively to denote a person who is a usurper of authority. In this light, the question of how *qērēaḥ* is to be interpreted on a figurative level should be approached systematically, beginning with an analysis of the Hebrew text that underlies translations of 2 Kings 2:23–24 (see my rendition below). My analysis is designed first to identify the ambiguities and other interpretive problems inherent in this passage. Next, it is important to discuss both the setting of 2 Kings, chapter 2, and the chiastic structure of 2 Kings, chapters 1–2, with special attention to the hairy mantle and to the focal point of the chiasmus, which is the ascension of Elijah, the final act involving his priesthood authority. Moreover, the striking parallels between the Elisha and Korah narratives require examination.

Fred E. Woods is Director of the LDS Institute of Religion at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Finally, I will summarize the various strands of evidence and offer a few observations on the meaning of this account.

A representative translation of 2 Kings 2:23–24 reads as follows:

> 23. And he [Elisha] went up from there to Bethel, and as he was going up on the road, some young men[1] went out from the city and mocked him and said to him, "Go up *qērēaḥ*! Go up *qērēaḥ*!"
>
> 24. And he [Elisha] turned around and looked at them and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. And then two female bears went out from the forest and tore open forty-two of the youths.

These two verses raise several issues. Besides the issues of who these young men were and from what city they and Elisha came, the major problem of this passage is the word *qērēaḥ*. The traditional understanding—that it refers to Elisha's baldness—creates a long-recognized theological problem: Why would a prophet of God pronounce a fatal curse simply for being called baldheaded by a group of youths? Further, how could God comply with the prophet's curse?[2] Several solutions have been offered; even so, a deeper study into the origin and significance of the word *qērēaḥ* and the passage in which it is embedded is warranted.[3]

## The "Young Men"

The first problematic phrase in this passage has always been translated literally to mean little children or small boys (*nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm*).[4] If the passage is taken at face value, what age would these youths have been? Other passages using *naʿar qaṭan* (the singular of *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm*) give no hint concerning the intended age. However, a clue appears when Joseph is called a *naʿar* at age seventeen (Gen. 37:2). He is referred to again as a *naʿar* at least two years later when he interprets pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:12).[5] Some clarification is also provided when the writer of the Elisha account selects the plural word "children" (*yᵉlādîm*) in the verse following the passage in question (2 Kings 2:24), rather than again choosing to use the words *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm*. In Kings, the word *yᵉlādîm* (children) is attested two other times.[6] Both of these refer to the young men who were serving as advisors to Rehoboam and had grown up with him (1 Kings 12:8, 10). In any case, the term *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm* is imprecise with regard to exact age. But on the basis of the context, I suggest that the age of the youths designated by these combined words would probably fall slightly under twenty years.

Taken in their plain sense, these words mean *small* youths. But a literal interpretation may not be the only valid one.

Rashi, a noted medieval Jewish sage, speculates that *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm* in 2 Kings 2:23 may be interpreted figuratively because of an earlier incident. He draws from the tractate Sota in the *Babylonian Talmud* to suggest that these *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm* were angry about the water miracle that Elisha had recently performed in Jericho (2 Kings 2:18–22). Elisha had earlier been approached by men of that city, who commented on the favorable location of Jericho but complained of the bad water (2 Kings 2:19). In response, Elisha asked for a flask full of salt; then he threw the salt into the bitter water and healed its bitterness (2 Kings 2:20–22).[7] Rashi explains that these youths had found employment carrying good water into the city for the inhabitants of Jericho.[8] With the miraculous healing of the bitter water, they were out of a job. Rashi also holds that these water carriers were specifically called *nᵉʿārîm* in 2 Kings 2:23 in order to symbolize that they were shaken from the commandments, as the Hebrew verbal root *n-ʿ-r* ("to be shaken") suggests. In a related vein, the well-known sage Radaq speculates in typical rabbinic fashion that these young men were called *nᵉʿārîm qᵉṭannîm* because, as the wise sages said, the youths were not only shaken from the commandments, but were also of little faith, as the Hebrew root *q-ṭ-n* ("little, small") implies.

The Hebrew text of 2 Kings 2:23 states that these youths "went out of the city" (*yāṣᵉʾû min hāʿîr*). From what city did they depart? The answer is not as obvious as most might think. Both ancient and modern interpreters state that these youths came out of Bethel. However, a careful reading of the text indicates that the city was not Bethel, but Jericho. As Elisha was going up the road *to* Bethel *from* Jericho after healing Jericho's water, some young men went out of the city to mock him. The text states that "he turned around behind him" (*wayipen ʾaḥᵃrayw*) to address these mockers (2 Kings 2:24). Since Bethel was still ahead of Elisha and Jericho behind him and because he had to turn around to address the mocking youths, most logically the young men had followed Elisha out of Jericho. In this regard, Rashi's connection between the healed-water and baldhead stories suggests to me an important interpretive direction.

A relevant matter concerns whether these young people (*nᵉʿārîm*) were a part of any of the preceding stories about Elijah and Elisha. Because the term *nᵉʿārîm* is attested in those earlier passages,

one must entertain this possibility. Another group, for example, the "sons of the prophets" (*benê-hannebî'îm*) from Bethel, called Elijah master (2 Kings 2:3). These sons of the prophets in fact had their residence in Jericho (2 Kings 2:5, 15), and in 2 Kings 2:15 we are told that they accepted Elisha's leadership. Elsewhere (e.g., in 2 Kings 5), we learn further that the prophets had *n$^{e}$'ārîm* serving them. It could be that those *n$^{e}$'ārîm* were laborers or servants who associated with the sons of the prophets still in Jericho. It is also possible to view the *n$^{e}$'ārîm* as guards or soldiers, which is another meaning for this term (see, for example, 2 Sam. 18:5, 12; 1 Chron. 12:29), confirming that they were probably not mere children. Perhaps they refused to accept Elisha as the prophetic successor to Elijah, accusing him of usurping authority, for they appear to be in conflict with the sons of the prophets who show their allegiance to Elisha by bowing to him and declaring, "The spirit of Elijah does rest upon Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15). Whatever the case, it is evident that the location of the *n$^{e}$'ārîm* in Jericho—the locale of the prophets and their assistants and the home of persons with deep loyalty to Elijah—is an important ingredient in the account. Events would certainly not have transpired as they did within a town inhabited by sons of the prophets.

**The Epithet "Baldy" or "Baldhead"**

Another matter needing clarification is the meaning of the term "baldhead" (*qērēaḥ*) which these youths hurl at Elisha. The Hebrew root *q-r-ḥ* is occasionally associated with ice and frost, but most often refers to baldness, as in the case of *qērēaḥ* here.[9] Various translations of the key sentence in 2 Kings 2:23–24 read something like "Go up, baldhead," or "Go up, baldy." Perhaps there is more to the mocking of the young men, however, than just saying that Elisha was bald. What was it in their taunt that provoked Elisha's curse?

Natural baldness is not viewed in the Old Testament as a condition of uncleanness. In fact, Leviticus 13:40 states, "And the man whose hair is fallen off his head, he is bald; yet he is clean." The deliberate shaving of any or all of the head was forbidden by Israelite law (Lev. 19:27; 21:5; Deut. 14:1). However, the prophets did use shaving in a figurative way as a term of impending doom and bondage (Isa. 22:12; Jer. 47:5; 48:37). The only instances in which deliberate shaving of all of the hair of the body is approved occurs

in the ritual cleansing of a leper (Lev. 14:8) and the purification of Levites (Num. 8:7–19). The shaving of the head is approved only in connection with a Nazarite vow. Initially, Nazarites would vow that razors would not come upon their heads (Num. 6:5). But when they concluded their vows, they were to shave their heads and make an offering of their hair in the sacrificial fire (Num. 6:18).[10]

In contrast to the plain meaning of the text, Rashi and Radaq—unlike most modern scholars—did not take the word *qērēaḥ* to mean that Elisha was physically baldheaded. Rather they suggested that the youths called Elisha *qērēaḥ* because he had "made bald" or destroyed their livelihood as water carriers for the inhabitants of Jericho.[11] However, this view is not supported by concrete evidence and should therefore be treated as unsubstantiated speculation. What seems more likely is that the youths were calling Elisha *qērēaḥ* to suggest that he was a usurper of prophetic authority, as I shall now demonstrate.

**Literary Structure of 2 Kings 1–2 and Its Significance**

2 Kings 1–2 contains the only detailed biblical account of prophetic succession. These chapters also form a chiastic structure, climaxed by the ascension of Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. T. R. Hobbs has provided a general outline of this structure,[12] which has been adapted in the following diagram:

A Severe test of authority; destruction of men (1:9–15)
  B Request for diseased item to be healed (1:1–8, 16–18)
    C The sons of the prophets admit departure of Elijah (2:2–6)
      D The sons of the prophets are witnesses (2:7)
        E Dividing of river Jordan with mantle/coat (2:8)
          F Symbol of succession: spirit/mantle (2:9)
            G Witnessing of the event by Elisha (2:10)
              H The ascension of Elijah (2:11)
            G' Witnessing of the event by Elisha (2:12)
          F' Symbol of succession: spirit/mantle (2:13)
        E' Dividing of river Jordan with mantle/coat (2:14)
      D' The sons of the prophets are witnesses (2:15)
    C' The sons of the prophets admit departure of Elijah (2:16–18)
  B' Request for diseased item to be healed (2:19–22)
A' Severe test of authority; destruction of men (2:23–24)

Hobbs notes that this chiasm contains the only physical description of prophets attested in the entire Old Testament. In 2 Kings 1:8 the characteristic feature of Elijah is that he is a "hairy man" (*ba'al śē'ār*). At the opposite end of this structure is the description of Elisha as a *qērēaḥ* (2 Kings 2:23). Hobbs interprets these descriptions to mean that Elijah was a hairy man and Elisha was bald. However, Hobbs mentions nothing more about this intriguing set of features.

In contrast, Montgomery explains that scholars have two interpretations for the words *ba'al śē'ār.* One translates them as "a hairy man," the other as "a man with a hairy garment."[13] This latter interpretation seems more correct when the word *śē'ār* ("hairy") is associated with the word "mantle" (*'adderet*),[14] which plays a central role in this account of prophetic succession. The word *'adderet* may be translated as either mantle, garment, or glory. In 1 Kings 19:16, Elijah is told by the Lord to anoint Elisha to take his place as prophet. When Elijah found Elisha plowing with twelve teams of oxen, he threw his mantle (*'adderet*) upon Elisha as a symbolic gesture to designate that he would soon succeed Elijah as prophet.[15] Zechariah describes the prophetic mantle in more detail (Zech. 13:4). His record states that in a future day false prophets will no longer wear the "hairy mantle" (*'adderet śē'ār*) to deceive.[16] The combination of these two words lends strong support to the interpretation in 2 Kings 1:8 that Elijah was a man with a hairy mantle or garment rather than being just a hairy man.[17]

The New Testament also lends support to this understanding. In Matthew 3:4, John the Baptist is described as wearing a mantle or garment (Greek, *endyma*) made of camel's hair.[18] He also wore a leather girdle about his loins. This description is virtually identical to that of Elijah's apparel in 2 Kings 1:8. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned the people to "beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing [*endymasin*], but inwardly are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15), a possible allusion to the wearing of a hairy garment of skins that implies that such a person comes with authority.

In 2 Kings 2, the mantle of Elijah becomes crucial to the succession story. Elijah parted the River Jordan with his *'adderet* (2 Kings 2:8). After Elijah and Elisha had crossed the River Jordan on dry ground, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for Elisha before departing. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9).[19] Although Elijah acknowledged this request as

difficult, he told Elisha that his desire would be granted, provided that Elisha saw him ascend into heaven (2 Kings 2:10). When Elijah ascended into heaven, Elisha saw the ascent and cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen" (2 Kings 2:11–12).[20] After rending his own garments, Elisha picked up the prophetic garment of Elijah (*'adderet*); he too smote the waters of the Jordan and asked, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" (2 Kings 2:12–14). In parallel to 2 Kings 2:8, the waters again parted in 2 Kings 2:14, and Elisha walked back across the bed of the River Jordan on dry ground.[21] Here the hairy garment of Elijah is clearly the symbol of prophetic authority, which now had passed to Elisha. Both men used this object to part the River Jordan as evidence that the power of Jehovah was invested in their appointment. One walked into Israel to lead her, and the other went out.[22] The sons of the prophets were witnesses to this transition of power and saw that the spirit of the Lord that had once rested upon Elijah now rested upon his successor Elisha (2 Kings 2:15). As the chiastic correspondence in 2 Kings 2:7–8 implies, these witnesses would also have seen Elisha wearing the hairy mantle of Elijah, representing the internal power with which Elisha had been imbued.[23]

**Korah and Elisha**

I began this examination of the structure in 2 Kings 1–2 with a discussion of the term for hair (*śē'ār*). The latter end of the chiasm deals with the young men calling Elisha a baldhead (*qērēaḥ*). I submit that these mocking youths called Elisha *qērēaḥ* because they refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the hairy garment that Elisha now wore as a symbol of prophetic authority. In a relevant vein, it is important to observe that if the vowels are dropped from this word we are left with the Hebrew root *q-r-ḥ*. This root is also the basis for the name of a Levite rebel named *Qora* (Korah),[24] who was the cousin of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:1; Ex. 6:18). Korah's reputation for trying to usurp priestly authority was infamous among the Israelites (Num. 16:40). The citation of Korah's antics in the New Testament underscores the prominence of this narrative as an illustration of rebellion against divine authority (Jude 1:11). This point invites us again to ask, were the youths simply calling Elisha baldy because he had no hair on his head? Or were they insinuating that he was without legitimate right to the prophetic mantle and was thus spiritually bald or unclothed?[25] Could it also be that they were

alluding to Korah, the Levite rebel, suggesting that Elisha was a usurper of authority, as Korah had sought to be?

Further suggestive parallels emerge in connection with the theme of authority when one compares the terminology and the punishments that are mentioned in the Korah and Elisha narratives. These similarities lend greater credibility to the idea that the word *qērēaḥ* on the lips of the young men may, in fact, have had reference to the infamous rebel Korah. 2 Kings 2:23 reads, "And he [Elisha] went up" (*waya'al*), then "and as he was going up" (*wᵉhû' 'ōleh*).[26] In this same verse, the term for "go up" (*'ᵃlēh*) is used twice when the youths cry out, "Go up, baldhead! Go up, baldhead!" (*'ᵃlēh qērēaḥ! 'ᵃlēh qērēaḥ!*). This taunt seems to point back to 2 Kings 2:11, in which Elijah went up into heaven. The mocking youths may be saying or implying, "Go ahead, try to ascend to heaven as Elijah did, you usurper of authority!"[27] Furthermore, Korah and his rebels esteemed themselves to be as holy as Moses and Aaron and believed themselves to be on the same level of authority as their leaders (Num. 16:3).[28] They accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves above the congregation. The youths in the passage of 2 Kings 2:23 seem to be accusing Elisha of like motives when in fact they are the guilty ones.

The punishments pronounced upon both Korah's group and the youths are remarkably similar when examined in light of verbal terminology. Two punishments fell upon Korah and his rebels. The text declares, "And the ground tore open [from *b-q-'*] beneath them" (*wattibbāqa' hā'ᵃdāmāh 'ᵃsher taḥᵉtêhem*) (Num. 16:31). The next verse states, "The earth opened her mouth and swallowed them, and their households, and all the men who were with Korah, and their property" (Num. 16:32). Others were consumed by fire: "And a fire went out (*yāṣᵉ'â*)[29] from the Lord and consumed [them]" (Num. 16:35). These two punishments add significance to the narrative of the punishment of the forty-two mocking youths in 2 Kings 2:24,[30] for the two punishment verbs in the Korah story reappear in the Elisha pericope. After the youths said, "Go up *qērēaḥ*! Go up *qērēaḥ*!" Elisha turned, looked at them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord (2 Kings 2:23–24). The punishment that followed is described thus: "And two female bears went out from the forest and tore open [from *b-q-'*] forty-two youths of them" (2 Kings 2:24). The root of the Hebrew word for "went out" is *y-ṣ-'*. In 2 Kings 2:24, the bears "went out," just as the fire "went out" against some of the rebels

(Num. 16:35). The Hebrew verb "tear open" (*b-q-ʿ*) also appears in both stories. According to 2 Kings 2:24, the bears "tore open" the youths; in Numbers 16:31, the earth "tore open" under the feet of some of Korah's fellow rebels, and they were swallowed.

## Conclusion

The thematic and terminological evidence suggests that the mocking youths in the Elisha story were not simply calling him a baldheaded man when they called him *qērēaḥ*. Rather, they were speaking to Elisha figuratively. Whether they were refusing specifically to acknowledge the transmitted authority of the prophetic hairy mantle that he had received from Elijah or whether they were intimating that he was like Korah, the rebel in the wilderness, or both,[31] is not entirely clear. Certainly they were not simply teasing Elisha by calling him "baldy," as some interpreters have suggested. Instead, they were accusing him of being a usurper of authority, an act that warranted serious consequences for speaking evil against the Lord's prophet. As a result, they incurred the vengeance of God who had previously warned, "And if you walk contrary to me, . . . I will send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children" (Lev. 26:21–22).[32]

### NOTES

[1] The Hebrew word for young men is *nᵉʿarîm*, which may also be translated as boys, lads, youths, servants, or soldiers; see Francis D. Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 654–55 (hereafter cited as *BDB*).

[2] Other incidents are also difficult for readers to understand. For instance, one thinks of the man stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36), the results of Achan's disobedience (Josh. 7), and the fate of Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11:30–40).

[3] See R. G. Messner's study of 2 Kings 2:23–25 for a summation of the objectionable explanations to this passage: "Elisha and the Bears," *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1962): 12–24.

[4] These words are combined in the plural only once in the entire Hebrew Bible, in this passage (2 Kings 2:23). These same two words appear together in the singular five times in the Hebrew Bible as *naʿar qaṭan*. Three of these references come from Kings. In 1 Kings 3:7, Solomon refers to himself by this term when he succeeds his father on the throne and feels inadequate to govern his people. Hadad the Edomite is also referred to as a *naʿar qaṭan* of the king's seed, as well as an

enemy to Solomon (1 Kings 11:14–17). The third reference in Kings comes from the story of Naaman; after dipping himself in the Jordan river, his leprous skin becomes like that of a *na'ar qaṭan* (2 Kings 5:14).

[5] For a complete discussion of the word *na'ar*, see the article "*Na'ar*" by H. F. Fuhs in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, and others, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), 5:507–18.

[6] For an exhaustive discussion of the usage of the word *yeled* ("child, youth") and its various forms, see the article "*Yeled*" by J. Schreiner in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, 3:633–39; English trans., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, and others (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:76–81.

[7] Whereas Moses had cast a tree into the bitter waters of Marah to heal them (Ex. 15:23–25), Elisha cast in the preserving element of salt. Although the element that Elisha cast into the water was different, the Jericho waters were also healed. The result of Elisha's act may be viewed as evidence that Elisha had indeed received the prophetic authority.

[8] If Rashi's interpretation is correct, then these *ne'arîm* were not simply youths or young men, but young servants.

[9] The root *q-r-ḥ* is used only as a verb meaning to make bald (*BDB*, 901). For all references to verbal usage of *q-r-ḥ*, see Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6; Ezek. 27:31; 29:18; Micah 1:16. The noun in our passage is derived from this verbal root.

[10] For a more detailed discussion on the issue of baldness, see W. L. Reed's treatment of this topic in *BDB* 1:343–44; see also the summary on baldness in the article "Sickness and Disease," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman, and others, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:11.

[11] See Radaq, *Commentary on Kings*, Miqra'ot Gedolot (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1976); Rashi, *Commentary on Kings*, Miqra'ot Gedolot (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1976).

[12] T. Raymond Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose," *Studies in Religion* 13 (1984): 332.

[13] James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 350.

[14] It is possible to understand that the term *'adderet* refers to an outer cloak that is worn on the outside of one's clothing. But I judge that here the text is talking of the hairy garment of authority. Compare D. M. Stec, who suggests that the mantle hidden by Achan in Joshua 7:21 may have been a "mantle of sheepskin or wool," which can be associated with Elijah's mantle of authority; see "The Mantle Hidden by Achan," *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991): 356–59.

[15] The fact that there were twelve teams of oxen may suggest another symbolic feature in this story. Perhaps the twelve teams of oxen with which Elisha was plowing were thought by the writer of the book of Kings to represent the twelve tribes of Israel whom Elisha would soon lead as a prophet.

[16] The Hebrew verbal root *b-g-d* means "to act or deal treacherously." The noun formed from this root is *beged*, which is translated most often as garment or covering. However, it also means "treachery," as evidenced by Isaiah 24:16 and Jeremiah 12:1 (*BDB*, 93–94). Note that the Septuagint states that the false prophets *will* wear a "garment of hair" as part of their deception (Zech. 13:4), emphasizing even more the symbolic significance of the garment.

[17] When the first son of Isaac and Rebekah was born, he was described as looking like an *'adderet śē'ār*, "a hairy mantle" (Gen. 25:25). Perhaps this account was written in a deliberately figurative way to suggest that, on the outside, it appeared as if Esau was to have the birthright, signified by this hairy mantle. However, Rebekah secretly knew better. She had been told earlier by divine means

that the older would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Therefore she helped the younger Jacob obtain the authority of the birthright by dressing him in Esau's clothing and putting a goat's skin on his neck and hands so that he would appear to Isaac as Esau (Gen. 27:15–16). Isaac followed through in giving Jacob the blessing of the firstborn when he felt the hairy covering on Jacob's hands and apparently believed that it was Esau. It is also intriguing to observe that Esau was later referred to as an *'îš śē'ār*, "a hairy man," contrasted with Jacob, who was described as an *'îš ḥālāq*, "a smooth man," or perhaps "a bald man" (Gen. 27:11). Perhaps in the Jacob and Esau narrative there is more behind the issue of their hair than scholars have noticed.

[18] Having a lot of hair seems to have been a sign of a consecrated person, as evidenced by the Nazarite vow to abstain from cutting one's hair. The prophet Samuel was a Nazarite (1 Sam. 1:11). John the Baptist also appears to have lived something of a Nazarite's life (see Luke 1:15). The question naturally arises whether Elijah or Elisha ever made a Nazarite vow.

[19] Some may interpret this doubling to mean that Elisha performed greater and more miracles than did Elijah. A better explanation would be that Elisha was probably alluding to the prerogative of the firstborn in which he is entitled to a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17). Perhaps Elisha was asking Elijah for one portion of the spirit for himself and one portion of the spirit in order to guide the people. I interpret the spirit that later rests on Elisha as the spirit of the Lord. This contradicts Ze'ev Weisman's interpretation. He views this imparting of spirit as the literal spirit of Elijah; see "The Personal Spirit as Imparting Authority," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1984): 225–34.

[20] It is interesting to note that this exact phrase is used by Joash, king of Israel, when Elisha departed from him at Elisha's death (2 Kings 13:14). This reoccurrence lends further credence to the idea that the editor of the book of Kings is trying to tie together the prophetic characteristics of Elijah and Elisha.

[21] It is difficult to read this narrative without comparing the transitions of authority from Moses to Joshua and from Aaron to Eleazar (Num. 20) to the succession of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. Moses parted the Red Sea (Ex. 14) and healed the waters of Marah (Ex. 15:23–25). Elisha also parted the Jordan river and healed the bitter water of Jericho (2 Kings 2:14–22). Joshua and Elisha parted the river Jordan and both walked across the river bed on dry ground (compare Josh. 3 with 2 Kings 2). Further examples could be multiplied.

[22] It is intriguing to note that Elijah, after parting the water with his garment, crossed over the River Jordan into the Transjordan area with Elisha. He left Elisha standing on the bank, then disappeared, much as his prototype Moses did. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.8.48–49 (§§ 320–31) and 9.2.2 (§ 28), for a late, detailed discussion of the disappearance of these two prophets. Elisha, on the other hand, crossed from the Transjordanian side back to the west side of the Jordan in the way that Joshua did shortly after he assumed the leadership of Israel from Moses.

[23] As mentioned, the word *'adderet* can be translated as either mantle, garment, or glory. In this instance we can see both meanings of this word, literal as well as figurative. Elisha literally was now wearing the garment of Elijah. In a symbolic way he was also clothed in, or glorified by, the spiritual mantle of his new prophetic calling. It is also interesting to note that the Hebrew verbal root *l-b-š* means to put on a garment or to be clothed. It is used specifically to refer to being clothed with the spirit in Judges 6:34, 1 Chronicles 12:18, and 2 Chronicles 24:20 (*BDB*, 527–28).

[24] I have scoured the literature and, to my knowledge, no one else has made a connection between our passage and the Korah account.

[25] J. Glenn Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 48, suggests that this reference could not possibly refer to natural baldness.

His argument is based on the dubious idea that the oriental traveler would never expose his head while on his journey.

[26] In a parallel passage, two squadrons of soldiers "went up" to see Elijah and were destroyed by fire (2 Kings 1:9–14). This parallel further reinforces the point that the young men who confronted Elisha may have been soldiers.

[27] This same root *'-l-h* ("to go up, ascend") is employed five times in the Korah story (Num. 16).

[28] Perhaps this attitude stemmed from their general misunderstanding of the words of Moses in the wilderness of Sinai. As Jehovah's representative, Moses had said to Israel, "You are a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Korah and his followers may have assumed that they were just as holy as Moses and Aaron and therefore should have received the office of priest, which appears to be the central issue in the Korah story. (See Numbers 16:9–10, where Moses tells the Levites that they have been given much and still seek the office of priest.)

[29] According to passages such as 1 Samuel 11:1, the Hebrew verb "to go out" can be linked with military ventures whose purpose is to punish others. The aspect of punishment is clearly an integral part of the accounts of the fire and the bears.

[30] Is this term to be taken literally or figuratively? The fact that the number is forty–two and not forty, as often appears, seems to add realism to the story (Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings*, 356). It is also of interest to note that in this same book Jehu is said to have slain forty–two of the brothers of Ahaziah who appear to be Baal worshippers (2 Kings 10:13–14). Perhaps a later editor reasoned that the young men servants in 2 Kings 2:24 were also Baal worshippers and thus explicitly mentioned the number forty-two.

[31] For a discussion of wordplays in the Old Testament, see Alfred Guillaume, "Paranomasia in the Old Testament," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964): 282–90; and Edward L. Greenstein, "Wordplays, Hebrew," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:968–71.

[32] For further information, see generally P. Budd, "The Rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. J. D. W. Watts (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984), 5:179–91; Robert P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969): 400–15; George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968); Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988); Avraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kiryet, 1981); G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976); T. Raymond Hobbs, "The Ascension of Elijah," *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. J. D. W. Watts (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 13:13–28; Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on Numbers*, Miqra'ot Gedolot (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eschol, 1976); Carl Keil, *The Book of Kings*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Jack Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 24 (1973): 39–50; Jacob Milgrom and Y. Avishur, eds., *Encyclopedic World of the Bible*, s.v. "Numbers" (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1985); James A. Montgomery, "Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932): 183–213; Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, ed. George E. Wright, and others (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); W. L. Reed, "Baldness," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, and others (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 1:343–44; Alexander Rofé, "The Classification of the Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 427–40.