Reading Micaiah's Heavenly Vision (1 Kgs 22:19–23) and 1 Kings 22 as Interpretive Keys.

This paper argues that Micaiah's heavenly vision (1Kgs 22:19–23) and 1Kgs 22 as a whole function as interpretive keys which explain subsequent material to the reader. Micaiah's heavenly vision explains that the following Aramean victory and the death of the king of Israel (1Kgs 22:29–36) did not present a challenge to Yahweh's supreme authority, but rather confirmed it. On a broader scale, 1Kgs 22 combined themes and events from the material around it (1Kgs 16–21; 2Kgs 3–13) to create a narrative that explained the historical events of the rise of the Arameans and the downfall of the Omrides. The chapter uses Ahab and Jehoshaphat as representatives of the kings of Israel and Judah to tell a story which explained how Yahweh used the Arameans to bring about the fall of the Omrides and free Judah from Israelite control.

The veritable matrix of historical issues and literary motifs that comprises 1Kgs 22 renders its interpretation a difficult assignment for any reader. Potential topics of discussion arising from the chapter are manifold. The prophetic interchanges in vv. 5–25 engenders debate about the nature and origin of true and false prophecy, while the account of the battle of Ramoth-gilead (vv. 1–4,29–36) raises questions about the relationship of this passage to the other battle accounts concerning Ramoth-gilead (2Kgs 8:25–29; 2Kgs 9:14).[1] In addition, the lack of specific identification of the king of Israel throughout the chapter (except v. 20) has resulted in discussions drawing from a range of historical and literary perspectives, while the presence of other known literary motifs, such as the disguised king, has allowed for further literary and rhetorical studies.[2] 1Kgs 22 has traditionally been regarded as composite,

*This research was undertaken with support from Midlands3Cities AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership. Thanks are due to Dr. Carly Crouch, Dr. Omer Sergi, Prof. John Barton and the members of the Nottingham Biblical Seminar for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Any mistakes are entirely my own.

[1] See, for example, Evangelia G. Dafni, "רוח שׁקר und falsche Prophetie in I Reg 22," *ZAW* 112 (2000): 365–385; Eep Talstra, "The Truth and Nothing but the Truth: Piety, Prophecy, and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion in 1 Kings 22," in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort*, eds. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos, VTS 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 355–371. On the battle accounts of Ramoth-gilead see Omer Sergi, "The Battle of Ramoth-gilead and the Rise of the Aramean Hegemony in the Southern Levant during the Second Half of the 9th Century BCE," in *Wandering Arameans: Arameans Outside Syria, Textual and Archaeological Perspectives*, eds Angelika Berlejung, Aren M. Maeir and Andreas Schüle, LAOS 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017): 81–97.

[2] For example, Miller argued the original king of the passage was Jehoahaz ben Jehu; J. Maxwell Miller, "The Elisha Cycle and the Accounts of the Omride Wars," *JBL* 85 (1966): 441–455. Others have argued, however, that the original king was Joram ben Ahab; Simon John de Vries, *1 Kings*, WBC 12 (Waco, Tx.: Word Books Publisher, 1985); Omer Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty and the Reshaping of the Judahite Historical Memory," *Bib* 97 (2016): 503–526, 515–516. Schmitz argued that Ahab was a projection of the kings of Israel in 1Kgs

particularly with regard to the prophetic material, however, others have argued that in its current form 1Kgs 22 displays some thematic integrity.[3] What follows agrees with previous arguments that view 1Kgs 22 as a literary composition, and proposes a new interpretation of the passage by arguing that both Micaiah's heavenly vision (1Kgs 22:19–23) and 1Kgs 22 as a whole function as interpretive keys which pre-empt themes and events in subsequent material and provide a lens through which the reader can make sense of them. The first part of the study argues that Micaiah's heavenly vision functions as an interpretive key for 1Kgs 22:29–36, explaining the events of the battle of Ramoth-gilead and the death of the king of Israel. This vision used a divine council type-scene to proffer a theological interpretation of the events of vv. 29–36 that inverted the usual ancient Near Eastern understanding of the relationship between kings and gods in warfare. As the heavenly vision is narratively located prior to the battle account, the events of the latter are read and understood through the lens of the former. The second part of the study surveys the chapters concerning Ahab (1Kgs 16–21) and the Aramean domination of Israel (2Kgs 3–13), and demonstrates that the narrative of 1Kgs 22 is a conglomeration of themes and events found in this surrounding material. Consequently, I argue that 1Kgs 22 is an impressive literary creation that draws together

---

22 (Barbara Schmitz, *Prophetie und Königtum: Eine narratologisch-historische Methodologie entwickelt an den Königsbüchern*, FAT 60 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 355), while Hubbard argued that the king of Israel is deliberately "un-named" in the narrative in order to emphasise the importance of other characters (Robert L. Hubbard, "Old-What's-His-Name. Why the King in 1 Kings 22 has no Name," in *God's Word for Our World, Vol. I: Biblical Studies in Honour of Simon John de Vries*, eds. J. Harold Ellens et al, LHBOTS 388 [London: T&T Clark Continuum, 2004]: 294–314). For further literary and rhetorical studies see Richard J. Coggins, "On Kings and Disguises," *JSOT* 50 (1991): 55–62; Keith Bodner, "The Locutions of 1 Kings 22:28: A New Proposal," *JBL* 122 (2003): 533–543; David Robertson, "Micaiah ben Imlah: A Literary View," in *The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspectives*, eds. Robert Polzin and Eugene Rothman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982): 139–149.

[3] Würthwein identified three layers to 1Kgs 22, wherein he located the heavenly vision in the latest layer; Ernst Würthwein, "Zur Komposition von I Reg 22, 1–38," in *Studien Zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, BZAW 227 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994): 178–187. Schweizer also identified three layers to the chapter, although he located the heavenly vision in the *Grundtext*; Harold Schweizer, "Literarkritischer Versuch zur Erzählung von Micha ben Jimla (1 Kön 22)," *BZ* 23 (1979): 1–19. Differently, de Vries argued that two originally separate narratives have been combined: Simon John de Vries, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (I Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 33–37; 40–42. However, Long, followed by Tiemeyer, argued that the lack of consensus among those positing different redactional levels, combined with some unifying stylistic components, suggests that the wisest course is to acknowledge some roughness to the narrative, whilst highlighting its thematic integrity; Burke O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to Historical Literature*, FOTL 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 233; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Prophecy as a Way of Cancelling Prophecy – The Strategic Uses of Foreknowledge," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 329–350; 337, n. 31. Whilst not denying the likelihood of some redactional development of 1Kgs 22, particularly with regard to the Zedekiah verses, this paper follows Long and Tiemeyer in arguing, on the whole, for the thematic unity of 1Kgs 22. With regard to Micaiah's heavenly vision, the view taken here is that it likely pre-dated the insertion of the redactional layer that framed events in terms of true and false prophecy (vv. 10–12,24–25).

material that both precedes and follows it, in order to tell a story that enables the reader to understand events in the following chapters.[4] Much like the heavenly vision, 1Kgs 22 is canonically located prior to the events it seeks to explain, and it thus provides an interpretive lens through which subsequent material may be understood.

1. The Context and Function of Micaiah's Heavenly Vision (1Kgs 22:19–23)

Previous interpretations of Micaiah's heavenly vision have tended to explain it either as a predictive warning to Ahab not to go into battle, as part of the later redactional layer concerned with true and false prophecy, or as an oracle inserted to explain the death of Ahab.[5] Here, however, we take a different view. The Hebrew Bible attests that the ancient Israelites believed that Yahweh commanded a divine council in the heavens, much like the earthly kings commanded a royal council on earth.[6] The divine council was the ultimate expression of divine authority in the ancient Near East. There was no more authoritative figure in the ancient world than the high god who sat on the throne and issued judgments in the divine council, for the decree of the high god issued in the council was final and incontestable.[7] Rhetorically, therefore, the use of the divine council scene in 1Kgs 22 made for a strong statement. By reporting the events of the council, the content of Micaiah's heavenly vision was authorized at the highest level and, implicitly, not open to disagreement.

For such a short passage, the heavenly vision explains a great deal about the following material in 1Kgs 22. Firstly, it explains why the Israelite-Judahite coalition was defeated – because Yahweh decreed that Ahab should fall at Ramoth-gilead. Secondly, it explains why the prophecies of victory were wrong – because the prophets were deceived by a false spirit. The mention of this false spirit has sometimes led to the association of the heavenly vision with the redactional layer concerned with true and false prophecy, but the heavenly vision is not concerned with true and false prophecy as opposed to each other; rather, it is concerned

---

[4] In this I concur with those who have argued that 1Kgs 22 is a "lesson story" with a didactic aim; e.g. Herbert C. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 184–185; Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty," 517.

[5] So, for example, Würthwein ("Komposition": 184–185) and Dafni ("רוח שקר": 381) view the vision as part of the later redactional layer concerned with true and false prophecies, while Tiemeyer argued that the purpose of the oracle was to entice Ahab and encourage him to go into battle ("Prophecy": 339).

[6] The parallelism between earthly bureaucracy and the structure and presentation of the divine realm was made explicit in Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994). The biblical conceptions of this divine council are widely thought to have been derived from earlier Canaanite models; so E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Israelite Literature*, HSM 24 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 118–205; M. Smith, *The Origins of Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41–53.

[7] So Roger N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13–14: A Study of the Sources of the Theology of Deutero-Isaiah*, SOTSMS 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 35, 42, 52–53.

with *why* the prophecies were wrong.[8] The concern in this passage, although related to issues regarding true and false prophecy, is more closely connected with war rituals. It was common practice in the ancient Near East for kings and commanders to seek the will of the gods before battle. On the occasions when the outcome of battles did not match the divinatory results of the pre-war rituals, investigations to ascertain what part of the ritual failed were often held.[9] The heavenly vision explains the reason behind the failed pre-war prophetic enquiries as having been Yahweh's will. Moreover, by naming Ahab explicitly in v. 20, the heavenly vision also explains that the king of Israel who died in the battle in vv. 29–36 was to be identified as Ahab. Finally, the vision implicitly explains that the Arameans and the Aramean gods were not deserving of any credit for their victory; the Arameans did not win at Ramoth-gilead because of their own strength or the power of their gods, but because Yahweh decreed Israel's defeat in his divine council. Due to the close connections between kings and gods, the usual ancient Near Eastern understanding of warfare was that a victory for a king implied a victory for his god, while a defeat for the king implied a defeat for his god.[10] However, the heavenly vision inverts this paradigm and makes clear that Israel and Judah's defeat and the death of the king of Israel did not imply Yahweh's defeat, but, rather, served as attestations of his supreme authority.

If the narrative of 1Kgs 22 is read without the heavenly vision, the implications of the defeat at Ramoth-gilead were not good for Israel, Judah or Yahweh. Without the vision, it would have appeared that the kings of Israel and Judah, Yahweh's earthly representatives, and thus Yahweh himself, were defeated by Aram. Seen through the lens of the heavenly vision, however, the political and theological outlook for Judah and Yahweh is much more positive. Because Yahweh decreed the outcome of the battle in advance, there were no negative repercussions of the defeat for his authority; rather, his foreknowledge attested his power. In addition, the lack of judgement on Judah implies that Judah was defeated only because of the alliance with Ahab, while the "victorious" Arameans appear merely as Yahweh's tool by which Ahab was to be killed.[11] By virtue of its location in the narrative

---

[8] Oswald noted the heavenly vision is concerned with the origin of the false prophecy, rather than with false prophets: Wolfgang Oswald, "Ahab als Krösus: Anmerkungen zu 1 Kön 22," *ZTK* 105 (2008): 1–14; 5.

[9] Rüdiger. Schmitt, "War Rituals in the Old Testament: Prophets, Kings, and the Ritual Preparation for War," in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank R. Ames and Jacob L. Wright, AIAL 18 (Atlanta: SBL, 2014): 149–165.

[10] See, for example, Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, BZAW 407 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 21–32; Jacob L. Wright, "Military Valour and Kingship: A Book-Oriented Approach to the Study of a Major War-Theme," in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle and Frank R. Ames (Atlanta: SBL, 2008): 33–56.

[11] In his analysis of the Elisha cycles Oeming also concluded that Yahweh used Aram as a tool to enact his judgement. He did not draw a connection between those texts and 1Kgs 22, but it seems that this view holds true for both. See Manfred Oeming, "'And the King of Aram was at War with Israel': History and Theology in the Elisha Cycle, 2 Kings 2–13," in *In Search for Aram and Israel: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, eds. Omer Sergi, Manfred Oeming and Izaak J. de Hulster, ORA 20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016): 401–12; 406; 409. Yahweh was not the only deity to use other nations as a tool of punishment for a rebellious people; the Mesha stele records how the Moabite god Chemosh used the Israelites

prior to the events of the battle, the heavenly vision acts, therefore, as a lens through which the account of the battle is read. The reader thus understands the battle account in the way in which the narrator intended it to be understood; namely, that Israel and Judah's defeat by Aram and the death of an Omride king were demonstrations of Yahweh's supreme authority.

The heavenly vision thus functions as an interpretive key explaining how the outcome of the battle contained in vv. 29–36 should be understood. Yet although the heavenly vision explains the outcome of the battle, it does not explain the intricate construction of the battle account, nor the historical issues arising from it. To explain these we must take a broader look at the material within and surrounding 1Kgs 22.

2. The Context and Function of 1Kings 22

The historical and literary issues arising from 1Kgs 22 are well known. These include the repetition of Ramoth-gilead as the location of a battle between an Israelite-Judahite coalition and the Arameans, as well as questions over the identification of the "king of Israel" and the "king of Aram," neither of whom are named in the battle account.[12] In addition, the manner in which the king of Israel died (1Kgs 22:35–37) bears notable similarities to the death of Joram (2Kgs 9:24–26).[13] The regnal formula of Ahab has caused further debate, as it implies that he died a peaceful death, which contradicts his identification as the king who died in the battle of Ramoth-gilead (1Kgs 22:20).[14] The narrative also attests the theme found elsewhere that the Omride-Judahite alliance was not approved by Yahweh and thus ended in defeat.[15] Additionally, the chapter draws on the literary theme of the deceived deceiver, pertaining to Ahab's ill-fated attempts to disguise himself, while the "chance arrow" that kills the king of Israel – a seemingly random act that leads to significant consequences - has been noted to be a folkloristic motif attested elsewhere.[16] The thirty-two captains of the Aramean chariots

---

themselves as a tool by which to punish the Moabites; John B. Burns, "Why Did the Besieging Army Withdraw? (II Reg 3,27)," *ZAW* 102 (1990): 187–194.

[12] See literature cited above in notes 1 and 2. In addition, Na'aman proposed that the battle underlying the 1Kgs 22 account was not that of Ramoth-gilead, but the battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE (Nadav Na'aman, "Was Ahab Killed by an Assyrian Arrow in the Battle of Qarqar?" *UF* 37 [2005]: 461–474), but see comments in Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty," 514–515. It should be noted that the lack of specification of the king of Aram in 1Kgs 22 is unique in the Books of Kings; all other chapters that narrate battles between Aram and Israel name the Aramean ruler as either Ben-hadad (multiple rulers: 1Kgs 20; 2Kgs 6:24; 13:24–25) or Hazael (2Kgs 8:25–29; 9:14; 10:32–33; 12:17–21; 13:1–3,22–23).

[13] This has often led to the conclusion that Joram was the original king of Israel referred to in 1Kgs 22; e.g., Simon John De Vries, "The Three Comparisons in 1 Kings xxii 4b and its Parallel in 2 Kings iii 7b," *VT* 39 (1989): 283–306; 303; Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty"; David Jobling, "The Syrians in *The Book of the Divided Kingdoms*: A Literary/Theological Approach," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 531–542.

[14] Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (London: Doubleday, 2000), 495; Würthwein, "Komposition": 181.

[15] Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty"; Sergi, "The Battle of Ramoth-gilead."

[16] Coggins, "On Kings and Disguises"; Bodner, "The Locutions"; Jeffries M. Hamilton, "Caught in the Nets of Prophecy? The Death of King Ahab and the Character of God," *CBQ*

(1Kgs 22:31) are paralleled in the thirty-two kings in the Aramean king Ben-Hadad's forces (1Kgs 20:1), and the motif of "giving into a hand" (1Kgs 22:6,15) also appears in 1Kgs 20:6,13.[17] Theologically, 1Kgs 22 presents Ahab as an adversary of Yahweh's prophet, and perhaps as an adversary of Yahweh himself, and the reference to dogs licking up the blood of the king of Israel (1Kgs 22:38) represents a clear attempt to connect the king's death in battle with Elijah's prophecy (1Kgs 21:17–19). 1 Kgs 22 is clearly, therefore, a complex text, and it is rare to find such a conglomeration of literary motifs and historical problems in a single chapter of the Books of Kings. However, many of these elements noted above find a parallel in the material surrounding 1Kgs 22 and to this we shall now turn.

The chapters that are considered in this next section fall within 1Kings 16–21 and 2Kings 3–13. The majority of these chapters contain material comparable to 1Kgs 22, especially with regard to Ahab, the Omride-Judahite alliance, and the conflict with the Arameans. The "Ahab" chapters comprise 1Kgs 16:29–22:40. Ahab becomes king of Israel in 1Kgs 16:29–33 and is immediately introduced to the reader as a sinner who provoked Yahweh's anger more than any other king before him. 1Kings 18 then narrates a conflict between Ahab and his prophets and Elijah the prophet of Yahweh. 1Kings 20 narrates Ahab's victory in battle against king Ben-hadad of Aram and 1Kgs 21 then narrates the incident concerning Naboth's vineyard, with Ahab and Jezebel's sin confirmed by a prophetic word of judgement from Elijah.

1Kings 22 clearly takes up a number of these themes. 1Kings 22:5–28 presents a sustained confrontation between Ahab and his prophets and Micaiah the prophet of Yahweh, which compares well with 1Kgs 18.[18] The battle account of 1Kgs 22 (1Kgs 22:29–36) is also stylistically very similar to that of 1Kgs 20. In contrast to the brief chronistic battle accounts given in 2Kgs (e.g. 2Kgs 8:25–29), 1Kgs 20 and 22 are both considerably longer narratives which focus on the character of the king in great detail, as the seemingly omniscient narrator reports private interactions on both the Israelite and Aramean sides. Specific connections between 1Kgs 22 and 1Kgs 16–21 are found in the repetition of the thirty-two captains/kings (1Kgs 22:31; 1Kgs 20:1), the "giving into a hand" (1Kgs 22:6,15; 1Kgs 20:6,13) and the reference to Elijah's prophecy (1Kgs 22:38; 1Kgs 21:17–19). Moreover, the portrayal of Ahab in 1Kgs 16–21 effectively foreshadows the narrative plot of 1Kgs 22; his sins reported in these earlier chapters contextualise the confrontation between Ahab and the prophet of Yahweh as well as Micaiah's announcement of Yahweh's judgement upon him (1Kgs 22:20). Even if the narrative of 1Kgs 22 did not originally refer to Ahab, therefore, the connections with 1Kgs 16–21 make its attribution to him readily understandable.

1Kgs 22 does not merely relate to material that precedes it, however: it also numerous contains connections to the material that follows it. Firstly, no reference to Ramoth-gilead can be found in 1Kgs 16-21, but it is a location of prominence in 2Kgs 8:25–9:16. Secondly, the idea that the Omride-Judahite alliance brought about military defeats and the Aramean

---

56 (1994): 649–663; 653; Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 356.

[17] Aarnoud R. van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda: War in the Old Testament Book of Kings and in Contemporaneous Near Eastern Texts (1),* SSN 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 157–159.

[18] Long noted that the catchwords "good" and "evil" (vv. 8b,13b,23) serve to bind this section together and encode the relationship between Ahab, the prophets and Micaiah; Long, *1 Kings*, 234.

subjugation of Israel and Judah is absent from 1Kgs 16–21 but is readily found in 2Kings.[19] Thirdly, Jehoshaphat does not appear in 1Kgs 16–21 but becomes prominent in subsequent material in 2Kings. Fourthly, the prophetic narrative in 2Kgs 8:7–15 resembles the heavenly vision in 1Kgs 22. 2Kings 8:7–15 recounts Hazael's murder of Ben-Hadad, which was prompted by Elisha's receipt of foreknowledge from Yahweh about Hazael's future victories over Israel. This prophetic episode is narratively located prior to the reports of Hazael's victories (2Kgs 8:25–29; 9:14; 12:17–21; 13:1–3,22–23) and it functions in a manner similar to the heavenly vision in 1Kgs 22. Both 2Kgs 8:7–15 and 1Kgs 22:19–23 were placed prior to a report of a battle at Ramoth-gilead in which an Israelite-Judahite coalition was defeated by Aramean forces. Both episodes also have a didactic function; 2Kgs 8:7–15 explains how Hazael became king of Aram, while 1Kgs 22:19–23 explains that the Aramean victory at Ramoth-gilead was Yahweh's will. Fifthly, the account of the battle of Ramoth-gilead in 2Kgs 8:28–29 appears very similar to the battle of 1Kgs 22:29–36. Sixthly, the deaths of Joram (2Kgs 9:24–26) and Ahaziah (2Kgs 9:27–28) provide a close comparison to the death of the king of Israel (1Kgs 22:35–36). Finally, Hazael's defeat of Joash and Judah in 2Kgs 12:17–21 in some ways might be thought to resemble Jehoshaphat's defeat in 1Kgs 22:29–36. Both kings of Judah who were reported as having been defeated by Aram - Joash and Jehoshaphat – were said to have done "what was right in the eyes of Yahweh" (1Kgs 22:43; 2Kgs 12:2). Rather than their defeats confirming their iniquities (so Ahab [1Kgs 22:20] and Jehu [2Kgs 10:31–33]), the piety of both Joash and Jehoshaphat outweighed the consequences of their defeats and they were given a good report by the editors of Kings (1Kgs 22:43–45; 2Kgs 12:2).

It thus seems that the narrative of 1Kgs 22 consists of a conglomeration of themes, characters, events and motifs from the material preceding and following it. The intertwining of these themes, characters, events and motifs has the effect of creating a narrative bridge, uniting 1Kgs 16–21 with 2Kgs 3–13. Through its emphasis on the hostility between Ahab and the prophets, its imitation of the narrative style of the 1Kgs 20 battle account, and the report of Ahab's death, 1Kgs 22 maintains continuity with, and effectively concludes, the preceding chapters of 1Kings. At the same time, it also introduces numerous significant themes and events that appear in the material following it. On a textual level, 1Kgs 22 facilitates the change in thematic emphasis from the preceding chapters' focus on Ahab and Jezebel to the following chapters' focus on the downfall of the Omrides and the rise of the Aramean threat. On a theological level, 1Kgs 22 connects the characters of Ahab and Jehoshaphat with historical events that were not otherwise attributed to them. For it was through 1Kgs 22 that the later events of the battle(s) of Ramoth-gilead and the Aramean domination of the southern Levant were connected to the Omride-Judahite alliance and the sins of Ahab. This was surely not accidental. What follows argues that the purpose of this combination was to create a narrative that could serve as an interpretive key for subsequent material and provide a theological explanation of these later events.[20]

---

[19] For the Omride-Judahite alliance ending in defeats see, for example, 1Kgs 22:1–4; 2Kgs 3; 8:16–22,25–29. For the Aramean subjugation or defeats of Israel and Judah see 1Kgs 22:36–37; 2Kgs 6:24; 10:32–36; 12:17–21; 13:1–3,22–23,24–25.

[20] Indeed, there was much to explain. The narratives in 2Kings may seem clear to a modern reader, but they raised challenging questions for an ancient reader. The usual ancient Near Eastern paradigms of warfare meant that the rise of the Arameans and their repeated victories

3. 1Kings 22 as an Interpretive Key

Before the Aramean domination of the southern Levant, Judah was subordinate to Israel. According to the biblical authors, this domination of Judah by Israel was reflected in the Omride-Judahite alliance. However, as the Aramean threat developed, Israel's power was curbed by the Arameans and the events of Ramoth-gilead destabilised the Omride dynasty, resulting in Jehu's coup and the destruction of the Omride line.[21] After the downfall of the Omrides and repeated defeats by the Arameans, Israel never again exerted the same level of control over Judah that it had during previous years.

The plot of 1Kgs 22 provides a literary precis of these events. In 1Kgs 22 Ahab and Jehoshaphat made an alliance wherein Judah was subordinate to Israel, joining forces to fight the Arameans at Ramoth-gilead (vv. 1–4,29–30). The events of the battle of Ramoth-gilead (vv. 29–36) resulted in the death of an Omride king and the defeat of his army. After this defeat by the Arameans, Israel's control over Judah weakened; the king of Israel died while Jehoshaphat returned to his own land and later refused an Omride request (v. 49).[22] In 1Kgs 22, therefore, the changing relationship between the kings of Israel and Judah is played out against a backdrop of Aramean military supremacy, with events at Ramoth-gilead playing a central role. Narrative and history are of one accord.

It seems likely, therefore, that in 1Kgs 22 the characters of Ahab/the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat function as typologies of Omride and Judahite kings, as quasi-generic figures representing the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Thus Ahab's sin and subjugation of the Judahite king mirrors the sins of Israel and its dominance over Judah, while Jehoshaphat's piety but subordination to Ahab mirrors the status of the Judahite kings in the Omride-

---

over Israel and Judah probably resulted in theological questions about Yahweh's authority and power vis-à-vis the Aramean gods. It should also be noted that despite their sinful reputation, the Omride kings were still Yahweh's representatives on earth and their downfall may not have been initially viewed as Yahweh's will, nor received with joy by the Judahites. The reign of Athaliah (2Kgs 11:3) even after the Omrides were deposed in Israel indicates Judahite support for the Omride queen; see Omer Sergi, "Queenship in Judah Revisited: Athaliah and the Davidic Dynasty in Historical Perspective," in *Tabou et transgressions: Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, 11-12 avril 2012*, eds. Jean-Marie Durand, Michaël Guichard and Thomas Römer, SGOA (Göttingen: Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015): 99–112. There may well have been some disagreement, therefore, about quite what the Aramean victories meant for Israel and Judah. Those who supported the Omride-Judahite alliance may well have viewed the rise of the Arameans as punishment for Jehu's coup against the Omrides. However, the author of 1Kgs 22 made clear that the reader should understand that Yahweh permitted the Arameans to punish Israel and the Omrides. The presentation of Yahweh being personally involved in Ahab's demise in 1Kgs 22 set a narrative precedent for the later chapters, wherein the downfall and deaths of other Omrides would also be presented as attestations of Yahweh's will.

[21] Sergi observed that the importance of the battle of Ramoth-gilead can be seen from the fact that its memory is preserved three versions in the biblical texts, as well as in a royal inscription from Aram-Damascus; Sergi, "The Battle of Ramoth-gilead": 90–93.

[22] The reference to every man returning "to his city" and "to his land" might also indicate the break in the relationship between Israel and Judah. The defeated Judeans do not return to Samaria, where the coalition set out from, but return to Judah, to their own land.

Judahite alliance. Ahab's sins were Israel's sins and Yahweh's judgement on Ahab mirrors his judgement on the nation of Israel. In both 1Kgs 22 and 2Kgs 3–13 this judgment is reflected in military defeats inflicted by the nation of Aram, the downfall of the Omride kings, and the weakening of Israelite control over Judah. Jehoshaphat's fate in 1Kgs 22 - defeated in battle but still alive – also reflects the fate of Judah under the Arameans. Judah would be defeated by Aram (e.g., 2Kgs 12:17–21), but, historically, Judah did not suffer as much under the Arameans as did their northern counterparts. Rather, in the long term, the rise of the Arameans benefited Judah as the Aramean subjugation of Israel allowed Judah to regain some independence from the northern kingdom. Moreover, Hazael's conquest of the Levant and, in particular, his victory over Philistine Gath allowed the kingdom of Judah to expand and develop in the geo-political sphere.[23] Through the character of Ahab, 1Kgs 22 pre-emptively explains that the forthcoming Aramean victories reflect Yahweh's judgement on Israel for the sins of its kings and its domination of Judah. Through the survival of Jehoshaphat, 1Kgs 22 foreshadows and explains how Yahweh will protect Judah during the Aramean conflicts; although Judah would suffer defeat as punishment for their alliance with the Omrides, the Aramean supremacy is the means by which Yahweh will free Judah from the Omride yoke.

By being placed prior to the events it seeks to explain, 1Kgs 22 thus provides an interpretive lens through which the challenging narratives about the changed relationship between Israel and Judah, the downfall of the Omrides and the defeats to the Arameans would be read. At the heart of 1Kgs 22, Micaiah's heavenly vision emphasises that Yahweh rules from his heavenly throne, planning and controlling these events in order to carry out his plan.[24] 1Kings 22 conveys this message on a wider scale, creating a narrative that literarily encapsulates this period of history, making known the outcome of Yahweh's plan before the events occur in the subsequent narratives.

Conclusions

The preceding has argued that both Micaiah's heavenly vision and 1Kgs 22 function as interpretive keys which explain subsequent material to the reader. The heavenly vision provides an interpretive lens through which the reader can understand the outcome of the battle of Ramoth-gilead in 1Kgs 22. The vision uses a divine council scene to explain to the reader that the Aramean victory and the death of the king at Ramoth-gilead did not present a challenge to Yahweh's supreme authority, but rather confirmed it. On a broader scale, 1Kgs 22 uses Ahab and Jehoshaphat as typological representations of the kings in the Omride-Judahite alliance to tell a story that explains the events in this period of history. The sins of

---

[23] Aren M. Maeir, "The Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project 1996–2010: Introduction, Overview and Synopsis of Results," in *Tell es-Safi/Gath 1: The 1996–2005 Seasons. Part 1: Text*, ed. A.M. Maeir, AAT 69 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012): 1–88; 43–52; Gunnar Lehmann and Hermann M. Niemann, "When Did the Shephelah Become Judahite?" *TA* 41 (2014): 77–94.

[24] Oeming observed that throughout the Elisha and Elijah compositions it is clear that the narrator perceives a divine plan behind the world's history; Yahweh controls events and guides the figures in his narration; Oeming, "The King of Aram was at War with Israel": 406. The same is true of 1Kgs 22.

Ahab - especially his refusal to listen to Yahweh's prophets and his subjugation of the Judahite king - reflect the sins of the Israelite kings more generally, explaining why Yahweh used the Arameans to end the Omride dynasty and punish Israel. Simultaneously, Jehoshaphat's defeat but ultimate survival foreshadows a contrasting fate for Judah. Jehoshaphat, and thus Judah's, defeat at the hands of Aram was a result of Judah's alliance with the sinful Omride kings. But although Yahweh punished the Judahite king, he also protected him from the worst of the conflict and used the Arameans as a tool by which to free Judah from Israelite control.

In sum, 1Kgs 22 functions as an interpretive key to events reported in 2Kgs 3–13, condensing a series of characters, locations and events known from other narratives into a literary microcosm that demonstrates Yahweh's power and authority in the midst of the challenging circumstances of the ninth century BCE. The narrative of 1Kgs 22 provides a literary precursor to the reports of these events in a way that makes clear to the reader that Yahweh protected and favoured Judah and the Judahite kings, despite their evident weakness compared to Aram and Israel.