

## Torn Garments and Calamity Mourning in 1 Kings 11:30

KERRY M. SONIA  
kmsonia@colby.edu  
Colby College, Waterville, ME 04901

First Kings 11:29–31 depicts the prophet Ahijah foretelling the dissolution of the Solomonic kingdom and the subsequent establishment of the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. The prophet engages in symbolic behavior to convey this message, tearing a new cloak into pieces and giving ten of them to Jeroboam, signifying the ten tribes that side with Jeroboam in the conflict. However, the ambiguity of the masculine singular pronouns in this passage makes it difficult to establish whose cloak Ahijah tears into pieces, Jeroboam's or his own. In this note, I challenge previous syntactical arguments that Jeroboam is the owner of the cloak in 1 Kgs 11:29–30. Furthermore, previous analyses of this passage have not examined it in the context of biblical mourning ritual, specifically calamity mourning in anticipation of an imminent personal or collective disaster. In addition to arguments on the basis of syntax, this ritual analysis of the passage suggests that Ahijah rends his own cloak in an act of calamity mourning.

---

The prophet Ahijah's oracle to Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 11:29–31 famously prophesies the secession of northern Israelite tribes from Judah and the rise of Jeroboam as the first king of northern Israel.<sup>1</sup> After delivering the oracle to Jeroboam outside

I would like to acknowledge all those who offered insightful feedback and helpful suggestions while I developed the argument of this article. I am particularly grateful for the contributions of Saul M. Olyan, Eric X. Jarrard, and Andrew Tobolowsky, as well as the anonymous reviewers for *JBL*.

<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of the compositional history of Jeroboam's rise to power in the MT, see Gary N. Knoppers, *The Reign of Solomon and the Rise of Jeroboam*, vol. 1 of *Two Nations under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies*, HSM 52 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 169–223. Knoppers emphasizes the Deuteronomistic language and rhetoric of this narrative, despite its possible incorporation of older northern traditions. For further discussion of the role of the Jeroboam narrative in the Deuteronomistic History, see Robert L. Cohn, "Literary Technique in the Jeroboam Narrative," *ZAW* 97 (1985): 23–35; and Keith Bodner, *Jeroboam's Royal Drama*, *Biblical Refigurations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11–16.

Jerusalem, Ahijah tears someone's garment—either his own or that of Jeroboam—which the prophet then associates with the imminent tearing of the ten tribes away from the hand of Solomon. While previous studies of the passage often interpret the tearing of the garment as a symbolic act, the result of Ahijah's tearing the garment of Jeroboam, I argue that Ahijah tears his own garment in an act of calamity mourning, one that anticipates the rupture of the Solomonic kingdom and the establishment of the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. This interpretation of the passage is preferable on the basis of Hebrew syntax as well as on the dynamics of biblical mourning. Calamity mourning in the Hebrew Bible, which shares some features with mourning for the dead but appears in the context of imminent personal or collective disaster, provides a context in which the tearing of one's own garment signals the political upheaval prophesied by Ahijah in 1 Kgs 11:29–31.

### I. THE SYNTAX OF TEARING GARMENTS

First Kings 11:29–31 is part of a larger narrative unit (1 Kgs 11:26–43) that introduces the figure of Jeroboam and, through the prophet Ahijah's oracle to Jeroboam, sets in motion the events leading to the secession of the northern tribes from Judah. The beginning of 1 Kgs 11:29–31 is relatively clear: Jeroboam and Ahijah the prophet meet each other outside the city of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The agent of the ensuing action, however, is less clear because it is difficult to determine the antecedent of the masculine singular pronouns.

At that time, Jeroboam went out from Jerusalem, and Ahijah the Shilonite prophet found him on the road. As for him, he was covered [והוא מתכסה] with a new cloak. The two of them were alone in the field when Ahijah grabbed the new cloak [ויתפש אחיה בשלמה החדשה] that was on him [אשר עליו] and tore it [ויקרעה] into twelve pieces. He said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces for yourself because thus said YHWH the god of Israel, ‘I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and give to you ten tribes.’” (1 Kgs 11:29–31)<sup>3</sup>

On the function of the Ahijah oracle in the Jeroboam narrative, see Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 159–70.

<sup>2</sup>In biblical passages where the prophet Ahijah appears (1 Kgs 11:29–39, 14:1–18), he is closely associated with Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant had been housed prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, according to the biblical narrative. In his commentary on 1 Kings, Mordechai Cogan argues that Shiloh likely functions in Ahijah's prophecy as a “symbol of Northern Israel's former glory, now eclipsed by the Jerusalemite establishment, both royal and priestly” (*1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 344). On Shiloh and the role of Ephraimite prophetic tradition in the Jeroboam narrative, see further Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 184–87.

<sup>3</sup>All translations of the biblical text are my own unless noted otherwise.

Who is wearing the new cloak, Jeroboam or Ahijah? Ahijah is certainly the one who tears it into pieces, but interpreters of the passage disagree about who is wearing the cloak in the first place. Where the MT simply reads “he,” using the masculine singular independent pronoun (הוא), the LXX resolves this ambiguity and reads “Ahijah” as the subject here. While some follow the LXX and understand “Ahijah” as the referent in the phrase “he was covered,” other interpreters, such as S. Min Chun and Mordechai Cogan, have argued that Jeroboam is the owner of the cloak. For instance, Cogan states, “The wording of the succeeding clause, ‘took hold of, grabbed’ (*wayyitpos*), solves the ambiguousness of this clause (noted by Qimḥi), because this action is inappropriate on one’s own garment; rather, the action was performed on a garment worn by a second party (cf. Gen 39:12). Thus, Ahijah seized Jeroboam’s cloak!”<sup>4</sup> Chun reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that the verb *תפש*, used with the preposition *ב*, indicates action directed toward an object (and person) other than the agent of the action. He cites other biblical attestations of this usage of the verb (e.g., Gen 39:12, Ezek 14:5, 29:7) with the conclusion that “a situation found in the story of Saul tearing off the cloak of Samuel seems similar in terms of who tears whose cloak—one tears the other’s cloak.”<sup>5</sup>

In support of his argument, Chun posits that the order of proper names and pronouns in the passage indicates the primary and secondary agents of action and, thus, the antecedent of the independent pronoun in verse 29. He notes that the subjects of verses 29–30 progress in the following order: Jeroboam, Ahijah, the independent pronoun, then Ahijah again. If Ahijah were the antecedent of the independent pronoun, Chun argues, “the name ‘Ahijah’ in v. 30a is unnecessary unless a break is intended, which is unlikely given the coherence of the paragraph.”<sup>6</sup> Yet the disjunctive syntax of *waw* + independent pronoun (והוא) in verse 29 suggests a narrative break here, an aside specifying the contemporary circumstances of the actions just depicted in the verse.<sup>7</sup> In such an aside, it stands to reason that the antecedent of the independent pronoun is the proper noun closest to it—that is, Ahijah. In fact, we find such syntax in other biblical passages, such as 2 Sam 4:5, where the antecedent of the pronoun is clear: “The sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went and came to Ishboshet’s house in the heat of the day. As for him, he was taking [והוא שכב] an afternoon nap.” In this example, the pronoun and participle clearly refer back to Ishboshet, and the clause seems to describe circumstances relevant to the ensuing action. The clause in 1 Kgs 11:29 concerning

<sup>4</sup>Cogan, *1 Kings*, 339. While many treatments of the passage opt for this interpretation, others have argued that Ahijah tears his own clothes. See, e.g., Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 68.

<sup>5</sup>S. Min Chun, “Whose Cloak Did Ahijah Seize and Tear? A Note on 1 Kgs xi 29–30,” *VT* 56 (2006): 268–74, here 272.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>7</sup>This use of the disjunctive *waw* is recognized in *IBHS* §39.2.3b.

the owner of the garment likely follows such a pattern: “As for him, he was covered [והוא מתכסה] with a new cloak.” Furthermore, Chun’s argument regarding the “primary participant” of the passage does not stand up to closer scrutiny: “Jeroboam continues to be the primary participant in this scene since his introduction in v. 29b and attaining the focus in v. 29c, until v. 30b where Ahijah tears the cloak and becomes the primary participant.”<sup>8</sup> Once Ahijah is introduced in the passage, it seems that he is the only one who performs any actions: he finds Jeroboam on the road, seizes and tears the cloak, and delivers a prophetic oracle. It is, perhaps, not surprising that the participle in verse 29 also refers to his actions, covering himself with a new cloak.<sup>9</sup>

Chun argues further that other biblical passages using the verb תפש, “seize,” along with the preposition -ב (Gen 39:12, Ezek 14:5, 29:7) support his interpretation of Jeroboam as the recipient of Ahijah’s action in verse 30. Because the preposition -ב may be partitive, it seems that it marks the part of the person(s) being seized in these passages.<sup>10</sup> For example, in Gen 39:12, the pronominal suffix attached to the verb seems to refer to Joseph, while the preposition -ב indicates the part of Joseph seized by Potiphar’s wife, his garment: “She (Potiphar’s wife) seized him by his garment [ותתפשהו בבגדו].” In Ezek 14:5, the “house of Israel” is marked by the direct object marker, while the preposition -ב precedes the part of the “house of Israel” being seized: “So that I may seize the house of Israel by their own heart [תפש את־בית־ישראל בלבם], all of whom are alienated from me through their ‘idols’ (lit., ‘dung-balls’).”<sup>11</sup> The syntax of Ezek 29:7 is slightly different. In this passage, the preposition -ב marks both the whole person and the part being seized: “When they

<sup>8</sup> Chun, “Whose Cloak?” 271.

<sup>9</sup> Prophets sometimes perform sign acts on themselves and sometimes on other people. A “sign act” refers to “all the nonverbal behaviors (i.e. bodily movements, gestures and para-language) whose primary purpose was communicative and interactive” (Kelvin G. Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, JSOTSup 283 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 14). In Hos 1–3, for example, the prophet Hosea marries a prostitute, has children with her, divorces her, and ultimately takes her back despite her adultery. The text clearly demonstrates that the prophet’s actions, involving other people, signify the covenantal relationship between Israel and YHWH. In other texts, however, the prophet’s actions are directed toward the prophet himself. For example, in Jer 27–28, the prophet Jeremiah walks around Jerusalem with a yoke on his neck, signifying the subservience of Judah to Babylon. For a discussion of sign acts among other modes of prophetic activity, see Martti Nissinen, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, BZAW 494 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 57–64; Jack Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 208–18. Recent scholarship has also examined prophetic sign acts through the lenses of performance and trauma. See, e.g., Louis Stulman, “Prophetic Words and Acts as Survival Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 319–31.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, *IBHS* notes the use of the partitive -ב with another “grasping” verb (אָחַז) in 2 Sam 6:6 (§11.2.5f, n. 35).

<sup>11</sup> On the biblical polemic against the גלולים, see Anjelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche*

seized you by the hand [בתפשמ בך בכפך] ...<sup>12</sup> Like 1 Kgs 11:30, these passages contain a verb of grasping and the preposition -ב, but their syntactical patterns are notably different from 1 Kgs 11:30.

While the preposition -ב marks the thing being seized in 1 Kgs 11:30, there is no second object that corresponds to the whole person, such as Jeroboam. Instead, the pronominal suffix of the second verb refers back to the cloak itself: “Ahijah seized the new cloak that was on him and tore it [ויתפש אחיה בשלמה החדשה אשר] [עליו ויקרעה].” In fact, when we examine other attestations of the “tearing” verb (קרע) used in this passage, we find that these other examples often depict subjects tearing their own clothes and, more important, exhibit the same syntax as 1 Kgs 11:30. Such biblical passages often use the verb קרע in the context of mourning (e.g., Gen 44:13, Num 14:6, Judg 11:35, 2 Sam 13:31, 1 Kgs 21:27, 2 Kgs 5:7, Isa 37:1, Esth 4:1). In fact, the syntax of the passage in which David tears his own garments in mourning for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:11) is strikingly similar to that of 1 Kgs 11:30: “David grasped his clothes and tore them [ויחזק דוד בבגדו ויקרעם].” Much like Ahijah, David takes hold of his own garments and tears them. The object of the action is marked by the preposition -ב, followed by the verb קרע with a pronominal suffix referring back to the garments. In another passage, 2 Kgs 2:12, when the prophet Elijah ascends into the heavens, his successor, Elisha, tears his own clothes into pieces, like Ahijah in 1 Kgs 11: “He [Elisha] grasped his clothes and tore them [ויחזק בבגדיו ויקרעם] into two pieces.” In short, these passages demonstrate that the syntax of 1 Kgs 11:30 is not an unusual way for biblical writers to depict someone tearing his own garments in mourning.

In fact, a similar construction appears in 1 Sam 15:27 after the prophet Samuel tells Saul that YHWH has rejected him. The tearing of Samuel’s robe in this passage is an obvious parallel with the tearing of Ahijah’s cloak in 1 Kgs 11:30.<sup>13</sup> As in 1 Kgs 11:29–31, the pronouns in 1 Sam 15:27 leave the agent of the action—Samuel or Saul—ambiguous:<sup>14</sup> “As Samuel turned to leave, he grasped the hem of his robe,

*Bilderpolemik*, OBO 162 (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 314.

<sup>12</sup>Notably, however, the LXX interprets “hand” here with a plural possessive, τῆς χειρὶ αὐτῶν, perhaps reflecting the Hebrew בכפם.

<sup>13</sup>Other narrative parallels exist between these two prophets. As noted above, Ahijah is consistently associated with the site of Shiloh, and Hannah dedicates her young son Samuel at the Shiloh sanctuary in 1 Sam 1:24–28 (Marvin A. Sweeney, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007], 160). Cogan minimizes the parallels between these passages, perhaps because they do not fit his argument regarding ownership of the cloak in 1 Kgs 11: “Yet the comparison is at best only partially apt. The tearing of the hem by Saul was fit symbolism for divesting him of his kingdom. In the present instance, however, it is not Ahijah’s cloak that is rent but Jeroboam’s” (340). See, similarly, Mark Leuchter, “Jeroboam the Ephratite,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 51–72, here 53 n. 11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27638346>.

<sup>14</sup>In fact, the LXX seems to resolve this ambiguity by inserting “Saul” as the subject of the first verb.

and it tore [ויחזק בכנף מעילו ויקרע].” In this case, rather than a pronominal suffix referring back to the object being seized and torn, the form of the verb קרע in the *niphal* does this work instead. Other features of the narrative further suggest that Samuel, not Saul, tears his own robe in the passage.<sup>15</sup> For example, like Ahijah’s actions, Samuel’s deeds seem to imitate those of YHWH, who will soon tear (קרע) the kingdom away from Saul and give it to another according to the next verse.<sup>16</sup> In addition, 1 Sam 15:35 explicitly states that Samuel mourns for Saul [התאבל שמואל], and as I argue below, tearing one’s garments is a quintessential mourning behavior in the Hebrew Bible. The similarities between this passage and 1 Kgs 11:29–31 suggest that tearing one’s garment is a characteristic prophetic act in which the prophet’s mourning behavior anticipates the destruction he foretells.

## II. THE RITUAL LOGIC OF CALAMITY MOURNING

While previous interpreters have noted that the act of tearing garments in these passages is a symbolic act,<sup>17</sup> none has examined it in light of biblical mourning behavior. I argue that this context helps us understand the ritual logic underlying these prophetic acts. After all, both Samuel’s and Ahijah’s mourning behavior fits well into the context of their respective narratives, in which the prophet foretells either the imminent demise of the Saulide dynasty or the dissolution of the Solomonic kingdom. In either case, the oral message and physical behavior of the prophet convey the rupture of a political order previously endorsed by YHWH.

<sup>15</sup>Previous studies of this passage often argue that it is Saul who tears Samuel’s garment. See, e.g., P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation*, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 268; Ronald Brauner, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ and 1 Samuel 15:27,” *JANES* 6 (1974): 35–38; Diethelm Conrad, “Samuel und die Mari-‘Propheten’: Bemerkungen zu 1 Sam. 15:27,” in *XVII. Deutscher Orientalistentag 1968 in Würzburg*, ZDMGSup 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969), 273–80. While these studies note many resonances of tearing garments in the ancient world, they do not consider the dynamics of calamity mourning and ritual violence in the Hebrew Bible and how these considerations affect one’s reading of this text and others, including 1 Kgs 11:30.

<sup>16</sup>In fact, the verb קרע appears again when the dead prophet Samuel delivers an oracle to Saul through a necromantic encounter in 1 Sam 28. Notably, verse 17 juxtaposes Samuel’s hand with that of Saul: “YHWH has done to you just as he spoke through my hand. YHWH has torn the kingdom from your hand.” This allusion to 1 Sam 15:27 in 1 Sam 28:17 suggests that it is Samuel’s act of tearing his own cloak—referred to here as a Yahwistic oracle delivered through Samuel’s hand—that signifies the imminent loss of Saul’s kingship.

<sup>17</sup>Marvin Sweeney’s description of the act is characteristic of many commentaries on the passage: “Ahijah’s oracle employs a typical prophetic symbolic action in which a physical act both symbolizes and effectuates the prophet’s oracular statements” (*I and II Kings*, 160). See, similarly, Iain W. Provan, *I and 2 Kings*, NIBCOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 95; Burke O. Long, *I Kings, with an Introduction to Historical Literature*, FOTL 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 128. Cogan refers to the tearing of garments in 1 Sam 15:27 and 1 Kgs 11:30 as “the use by a prophet of imitative magic, giving force to a prediction made in YHWH’s name” (*I Kings*, 340).

Thus, unlike David and Elisha, who are mourning for persons in the passages cited above, both Samuel and Ahijah are engaging in what has been called “calamity mourning.”<sup>18</sup>

Those who practice calamity mourning exhibit behaviors characteristic of mourning the dead, but they are distinguished by their context. In his study of biblical mourning, Saul M. Olyan describes calamity mourning as “mourning when disaster strikes that is not characterized by any evident petitionary purpose.”<sup>19</sup> The mourning behavior of Ahijah and Samuel is not petitionary, because neither seems to beseech YHWH in order to prevent the destruction they prophesy. One example of calamity mourning cited by Olyan in his study, Ezek 7:18, provides a particularly helpful parallel to 1 Sam 15:27 and 1 Kgs 11:29–31. In this passage, the prophet Ezekiel describes the mourning behaviors exhibited by refugees from Judah, fleeing from the imminent conquest of Jerusalem:

They shall put on sackcloth,  
Horror shall cover them.  
Shame shall be on all faces,  
Baldness upon all their heads.

In anticipation of the destruction of Jerusalem, these people exhibit behaviors characteristic of mourning, such as wearing sackcloth and shaving or pulling out their hair. The political turmoil caused by Absalom’s revolt offers a similar context in which refugees exhibit mourning behaviors, including tearing their garments. In 2 Sam 15:30, David and his associates flee from Jerusalem, weeping and covering their heads in mourning. In verse 32, David meets his friend Hushai the Archite, whose head is covered with dirt and whose robe is torn. Here again, it seems that David and his associates perform mourning behaviors in response to a political crisis, specifically the loss of David’s royal power. Like the Judean refugees in Ezek 7:18 and 2 Sam 15:30, the prophets Samuel and Ahijah exhibit behavior characteristic of calamity mourning, tearing their clothes in anticipation of the political rupture they prophesy.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21, 98–104. Other texts in the Hebrew Bible depict the tearing of one’s clothes to signify an imminent threat to one’s land and political power or collective disaster. In 2 Kgs 11:14, for instance, Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, tears her own clothes when she loses political power and will soon be executed. In 2 Kgs 18:37, Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joash come to Hezekiah with their clothes torn after listening to the words of Rabshakeh predicting the fall of Jerusalem to the Assyrian king. In other passages, tearing one’s clothes may be petitionary in nature. After Josiah listens to Hilkiah read aloud the scroll found in the temple, he tears his own clothes in 2 Kgs 22:11, anticipating the wrath of YHWH upon Judah. For a discussion of this passage in the context of petitionary mourning, see Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 78.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>20</sup>The biblical evidence shows that these mourning behaviors may either anticipate catastrophe or respond to it. In the case of 2 Sam 15, David and his associates respond to it; in Ezek

The recognition of these prophetic acts as examples of mourning behavior further supports the argument that the prophets Samuel and Ahijah tear their own garments in 1 Sam 15:27 and 1 Kgs 11:30. In other words, if Saul tears the robe of Samuel in 1 Sam 15:27, then he is violently imposing mourning behavior upon the prophet. The same goes for Ahijah and Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 11:30. Based on what we know of this ritual behavior in the Hebrew Bible, it is unlikely that Saul or Ahijah would impose such a state upon Samuel or Jeroboam, respectively. In fact, the imposition of mourning behavior on others in the Hebrew Bible has been characterized as a form of “ritual violence” typically perpetrated against one’s adversaries in an attempt to punish and humiliate them.<sup>21</sup> For example, in 2 Sam 10, David sends emissaries to participate in mourning rituals for his recently deceased political ally, the king of Ammon. However, the new Ammonite king Hanun suspects that David’s emissaries are spies and decides to punish and shame them by imposing mourning behaviors upon them in verse 4: “Hanun took David’s servants, shaved off half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, up to their buttocks, and sent them away.” Clearly, Hanun views David’s servants as adversaries, not allies, and treats them as such, giving them the appearance of those who are dejected in mourning. A similar context characterizes the actions of Nehemiah in Neh 13:25, in which Nehemiah berates and pulls out the hair of Judean men who have married foreign women. The violent depilation of these men forces them into a posture of mourning. However, nothing about 1 Sam 15:27 or 1 Kgs 11:30 suggests such a dynamic between the prophets and the recipients of their oracles. Saul still seeks the aid of Samuel even after hearing the prophet’s oracle, and Ahijah is unlikely to impose mourning behavior upon the man he is designating as the future king of northern Israel, especially if 1 Kgs 11:29–31 belongs to an originally pro-northern tradition.

### III. CONCLUSION

The syntax of 1 Kgs 11:30 is strikingly similar to other biblical passages in which someone seizes and tears his own clothes in mourning, including David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:11 and Elisha’s mourning for Elijah in 2 Kgs 2:12. Previous studies of this passage have overlooked the relevance of

---

7:18, it is anticipatory. The circumstances surrounding the mourning behavior of Samuel and Ahijah more closely resemble the latter.

<sup>21</sup> Saul M. Olyan, “Introduction: Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2. Olyan applies this framework of “ritual violence” to mourning ritual in “Theorizing Violence in Biblical Ritual Contexts: The Case of Mourning Rites,” in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Studies in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Saul M. Olyan, RBS 71 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 169–80.

calamity mourning in interpreting Ahijah's behavior. Like the Judeans fleeing from the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in Ezek 7:18, Ahijah tears his own cloak in anticipation of the dissolution of Solomon's kingdom. This interpretation of 1 Kgs 11:30 may also help us understand the tearing of Samuel's robe in 1 Sam 15:27. Exhibiting similar, though not identical, syntax, the narrative of this passage is a clear parallel to 1 Kgs 11:30, and Samuel's calamity mourning fits the context of his oracle: YHWH has rejected Saul and will soon give his kingdom to another. The fact that 1 Sam 15:35 explicitly refers to Samuel mourning for Saul further supports this reading of the text. In both of these passages, the prophets imitate the actions of YHWH, who will soon tear royal power away from dynasties YHWH had previously chosen to rule. This prior Yahwistic endorsement provides a plausible rationale for the prophets' calamity mourning. As Yahwistic prophets themselves, they mourn the failure and subsequent punishment of dynasties once favored by YHWH.

It is remarkable that this trope is deployed not only in a Deuteronomistic narrative establishing the beginnings of the Davidic dynasty but also in a northern tradition about a separate Yahwistic jurisdiction. To some, it may seem strange that the Shilonite prophet Ahijah would engage in mourning behavior at the dissolution of the Solomonic kingdom, especially if verses 29–31 constitute what Cogan calls the “kernel of the Ahijah prophecy,” relatively untouched by Deuteronomistic editing.<sup>22</sup> Why might a northern tradition depict the prophet mourning what is, in essence, the foundation of the northern kingdom led by Jeroboam? The dynamics of biblical mourning offer a helpful interpretative framework here because mourning ritual both signals and mediates social and political ruptures.<sup>23</sup> As a Yahwistic prophet, albeit a northern one, Ahijah engages in calamity mourning that

<sup>22</sup> Cogan, *1 Kings*, 344.

<sup>23</sup> The notion that rituals surrounding death, including mourning, help to mediate social and political rupture is not new. In the early twentieth century, Robert Hertz argued that death rituals minimize the trauma of individual death by reinforcing the continuation of the social order (“Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort,” in *L'Année Sociologique* 10 [1905–1906]: 48–137). Because Hertz's paradigm involves the transition of the deceased within that order, it is no surprise that it later appears in Arnold van Gennep's analysis of liminality and rites of passage, *Les Rites de passage* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1909). A key assumption in these analyses is that ritual triumphs over death, which threatens social and political stability. According to this theory, death ritual aims to manage death as much as possible, making it subject to social constraints like any other aspect of life and, thus, obscuring the nature of death as something uncontrollable and disruptive. Later studies, such as that of Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, modify this approach, arguing, “It is not so much a question of Hertz's reified ‘society’ responding to the ‘sacrilege’ of death, as of the mortuary rituals themselves being an occasion for *creating* that ‘society’ as an apparently external force” (“Introduction,” in *Death and the Regeneration of Life* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 1–44, here 6). Thus, biblical mourning is an opportunity for the construction of social relationships through ritual—“for the affirmation, formation, re-negotiation, or termination of social bonds between individuals, groups, and political entities” (Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 51). See, similarly, Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead*

anticipates the dissolution of the Solomonic kingdom but also acknowledges YHWH's prior endorsement of the Davidic dynasty. In effect, Ahijah's mourning behavior signals that this rupture is the will of YHWH and not the result of human political machinations against Solomon and his heirs. From a northern perspective, this rhetoric could be construed as ideologically and politically advantageous.

In his analysis of Ahijah's prophecy, Mark Leuchter emphasizes that 1 Kgs 11:29–31 draws upon features of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7, perhaps because the covenant was at this point inextricably tied to pervasive notions of Israelite national and religious identity.<sup>24</sup> Ahijah's mourning behavior is an effective strategy for mediating this tension. In fact, this use of mourning to negotiate political upheaval is well attested in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the history of David's rise to power. When David tears his clothes in mourning for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:11, for example, his public lament makes the tacit argument that he neither wanted nor took part in the deaths of these men who stood in the way of his ascent to the throne.<sup>25</sup> In fact, by mourning for the Saulides, David is asserting his status as a friend and, perhaps, kinsman of the dead. In this way, mourning behavior can be used to deflect accusations of treachery and to signal continuity—even in the midst of rupture—with preexisting political structures and religious ideologies. Viewed in this light, the mourning behavior exhibited by Ahijah in tearing his garment helps mediate the tension between the covenant promise to David and the rise of Jeroboam.

---

*Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, FAT 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 8–21.

<sup>24</sup>Leuchter, "Jeroboam the Ephratite," 59.

<sup>25</sup>For a discussion of David's use of mourning ritual to deflect blame for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, see James C. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal," *JBL* 99 (1980): 521–39; here 529, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3265191>.