CHAPTER TWO

A RHETORICAL-CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

Before drawing final conclusions regarding putative sources within our text, this study will now undertake a rhetorical-critical analysis of the Hezekiah-Sennacherib narrative. Following the latter analysis, the results will be brought into conversation with the results of the above source-critical analysis to determine the ramifications of rhetorical analysis for source-critical conclusions.

I. Rhetorical-Critical Analysis

The first task of this rhetorical analysis will be a structural analysis which will delineate the limits of the Hezekiah narratives. Searching for one authentic structure in a biblical narrative in reality is misguided as biblical writers employed a variety of literary techniques to create structures for their narratives. Due to their flexibility and the fact that they are embedded in the text, these techniques allow for the perception of multiple structures. As Bar-Efrat has noted, “The limits of the literary unit cannot be fixed a priori, but...they are dynamic and vary according to the kind of questions the literary critic desires to pose, provided of course that the delimiting of the unit has its justification in the text.”¹ This should caution the literary critic against limiting a text’s boundaries rigidly, as different approaches will reveal different structures. However, by employing various methods of determining structure, the similarities between these structures will provide a firmer ground for conclusions regarding the reality of a coherent structure that is not merely the product of the interpreter’s imagination. When attempting to assess the coherence of a narrative or discern unevenness in the text (which has suggested the existence of different sources in a text in the past), a clear and defensible understanding of a perceived structure would obviously be of benefit.

In the book of Kings each section that can be delimited as an independent pericope is also part of a greater narrative. Each pericope has more than one context that must be acknowledged and taken into account. The following analyses employ various rhetorical-critical methods in an attempt to delimit the textual boundaries and discern the structure(s) of the Hezekiah macro-narrative in 2 Kings.

A. The Structure of the Hezekiah Macro-Narrative

The DH structures most of its narratives concerned with the monarchies of Judah and Israel by employing royal frames that consist of regnal résumés. The start and end of these regnal reports are framed by statements that have a summative relationship (and often shared expressions) which report the end of one monarch’s reign and the beginning of that of his successor. These succession formulas serve as the outer frames of most regnal reports in the DH and the Hezekiah macro-narrative is no exception, beginning (2 Kgs 18:1–2) and ending (2 Kgs 20:20–21) with a customary Deuteronomistic royal frame. The narrative form is typical of regnal accounts in the book of Kings, giving an evaluation of the reign of the monarch, and not just an account of the details of his regency.² Hezekiah is said to have done what was ‘right’ (ישׁר) in Yahweh’s eyes as his ancestor David had done. The Hezekiah macro-narrative is demarcated initially by this introductory look at Hezekiah and the particulars of his life. The age of Hezekiah at his ascension to the throne (25 years old), the length of his reign (29 years) and the queen mother’s identity and genealogical origin are all mentioned.³

The end of the Hezekiah macro-narrative is demarcated by a concluding regnal résumé in 2 Kgs 20:20–21. This details some of his building projects, referring the reader to another source for a fuller account of these ventures, then closing with the succession of his son Manasseh to the throne. This second part of the royal frame concludes the Hezekiah macro-narrative.

³ Fritz (Kings, 358) notes that this introductory formula for Hezekiah does differ in some respects from the usual Dtr pattern regarding the cult reform in v. 4 and the portrayal of Hezekiah’s piety in vv. 5–7.