

The Hebrew Corner

A principle of the Tanach that is emphasized frequently is that the individual is to give to God first, before he receives something for himself. The first example of this principle that we will look at is described in 1 Samuel 9:5-10:

“And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us. And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go. Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way. (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.) Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.”

Saul recognized that he needed to bring something to a man who was a spokesman for God in order to get the help he needed. This must have been the common practice at the time of this passage. Seer in Hebrew is roeh (ראה, roh-EH) or one who sees. In the next passage, the prophet Elijah demonstrates this principle, as he asks

the widow to give up what she thought would be the last meal for her and son (1 Kings 4:8-17):

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.”

The Hebrew word translated as bread in the passage is lechem (לֶחֶם, LEH-chehm), from which the name of the town of Bethlehem, or in Hebrew Beit-Lechem (בֵּית-לֶחֶם, bayt-LEH-chehm) is derived, which means “house of bread.”

A similar story is presented in 2 Kings, this time involving the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-17):

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.”

The Shunammite woman continually provided food for Elisha, although it was not until after he had come to her house many times that she perceived that he was a man of God. She then arranged for him to have a chamber of his own to stay in when he

came. Taking care of the prophet first, she was rewarded by God, who gave her a son. The text also refers to her as a great woman. Great in Hebrew is gadol (גדול, gah-DOHL). Her generosity and her honor for the man of God, and by extension, for God himself was a clear indication of her greatness.

Jesus, our Yeshua, himself gave us an example of this principle as described in the following passage from the B'rit Hadasha (Matthew 14:14-21):

“And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.”

Jesus surely could have miraculously fed the people without requiring any loaves of bread or fishes to start with, but here he was setting an example to follow that, first, you must give what you have to God, in this case, five loaves and two fishes, and then he will take care of all your needs.

Thank you Lord, for giving us this instruction to live by. May you seek God first this month, as it is his desire to bless you. Shalom to all.