

The Hebrew Corner

The relationship between two prophets of Samaria, also known as the northern kingdom of Israel, is one of the most interesting and moving stories of the Tanach. None of the kings of Samaria did what was right in the sight of God. Thus the people were led astray by a series of rulers who did not honor or worship God. God sent numerous prophets to Samaria, but the most notable of these were Elijah and Elisha. Elijah in Hebrew is eliyahu (אליהו, ay-lee-YAH-hoo), meaning God is Yah, and Elisha is (just as it appears) elisha (אלישע, eh-lee-SHAH), meaning God is salvation.

The first encounter between Elijah and Elisha that is presented in the Tanach comes after Elijah had fled from Jezebel, who had vowed to have him killed, and was apparently going through a period of depression. God miraculously provides food and drink for him, and speaks to him in a quiet voice, and asks him what he was doing there. Elijah tells him that the people of Samaria have killed the prophets, and that he alone was left. In response, God gave Elijah the following instructions (1 Kings 19:15-18):

“And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

The Hebrew word in the passage translated as anoint is mashach (משח, mah-SHACH) which means to smear or anoint with oil or another liquid or substance. Derived from this is the Hebrew word mashiach (משיח, mah-SHEE-ahch), which in English is anointed, anointed one, or messiah. So Elisha was also to be a prophet of God, first as a servant of Elisha, and then to take the office of Elijah as prophet of God to Samaria. The next passage portrays the first encounter between Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21):

“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.”

The Hebrew word translated in the passage as yoke of oxen is tsamad (צמד, tsah-MAHD), which means a couple or pair (usually of animals). Elisha was a farmer, yet called by God to be a prophet. From this point on until the end of Elijah's ministry, we are told no more about this prophet in scripture. We may assume that Elisha accompanied Elijah during his encounter with King Ahab concerning the plot to murder Naboth of Jezreel and take over his vineyard, and with King Ahaziah when he brought down fire from heaven to destroy members of his guard, and then prophesied his death. From these encounters, he must have learned that a prophet of God is

well-equipped to do the job that God has for him to do.

This leads to the passing of the torch from Elijah to Elisha that is described in 2 Kings 2. The journey started in Gilgal and continued on to two other cities (2 Kings 2:1-14):

“And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double

portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.”

This was obviously an emotional time for Elisha as he is reminded twice by a group of prophets that God was going to take Elijah away from him, and he did not want to hear this. The Hebrew word he said to them, translated as hold your peace, is hecheshu (החשו, heh-cheh-SHOO), meaning be silent. This is a command sounding similar to the English exclamation, hush. When Elijah was taken up in the whirlwind to heaven, Elisha uttered the following Hebrew phrase, avi avi rechev yisrael uparashav (יאבי אבי רכב ישראל ופרשיו, ah-VEE ah-VEE REH-chev oo-pah-rah-SHAV), translated literally, My father, my father, a chariot of Israel and his horsemen. Elisha here indicates that Elijah has been a father to him. From here on, Elisha must carry on in the spirit of Elijah, but without his physical presence. As we can see from the above passage, the Lord gave him power to do miracles of the kind that Elijah did. Along these lines, it was Elisha who anointed Hazael to be king of Syria, and Jehu to be king of Samaria, and not Elijah. Thus God's command to Elijah was fulfilled

through a prophet who carried the spirit of Elijah. We know of another prophet who came in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:12-17):

“And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

This was an angel of God proclaiming to Zachariah that his son, John, who we know as John the Baptist, would have the spirit and power of Elijah, and prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, our Yeshua. Although the spiritual gifts of Elisha, Elijah, and John the Baptist would be of the same order and magnitude, the passage makes it clear that ultimately the power came from the Holy Spirit.

May each of you receive a double portion of blessings from God this month. Shalom to all.