

The Hebrew Corner

This month the discussion concerns the confrontational role that prophets performed in biblical times. Especially important was the confrontation of kings with their wrongdoing, as often the subjects of the king were too fearful to confront the king, even when the king was clearly in error. The prophet who confronted the king would also be risking his life or freedom, which explains the numerous false prophets who would tell the king only good news about his situation.

First let's look at the confrontation of King Baasha of Samaria by the prophet Jehu (1 Kings 16:1-4):

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.”

The word translated posterity in Hebrew is *ahar* (אָחֵר, ah-CHAHR), whose primary meaning is afterwards or behind. Here the sense is that the descendants of Baasha would be cut off so that none could ascend to the throne. The word translated as dog in Hebrew is *keleb* (כֶּלֶב, KEH-lehv), whose root is the same as that of the name Caleb,

who we encounter in the story of the ten spies in Exodus. The word translated as fowl in Hebrew is oaf (עוף, OHF), which can also mean bird. The posterity of Baasha was cut off by Zimri, a captain of Baasha's son Elah, who was king of Samaria at the time. This is described in the following passage (1 Kings 16:12-13):

“Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.”

In Samaria, the northern kingdom of Israel, the posterity of many kings were cut off, accounting for the use of the words of the prophecy of Jehu being repeated two other times by prophets: to Jeroboam by Abijah (1 Kings 14:11), and to Ahab by Elijah (1 Kings 21:24). The protection of God clearly had to be with these prophets as they delivered such a stark message of judgment to these evil kings.

We see in the story of King Asa in 2 Chronicles what could happen to a prophet if the king did not take the confrontational message well. King Asa was described as a king who did what was right in the eyes of God. He was given favor in the war against Zerah of Ethiopia, being greatly outnumbered with 580,000 men fighting against one million Ethiopians. When he cried out to the Lord, and trusted in him, the Lord went in front of Asa and the army of Judah, and overthrew the Ethiopian army, and sent them fleeing away. However, late in the reign of Asa, King Baasha of Samaria and his army came up against Judah, and built Ramah apparently as a blockade to prevent supplies from being transported to Judah. In

this case, Asa sent gold and silver to Benhadad, king of Syria, to buy his support against Samaria. Syria in turn struck several of the cities of Samaria, and Baasha then left off building of Ramah. In this case, Hanani the prophet was sent to confront Asa (2 Chronicles 16:7-10):

“And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly, therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time.”

In this passage Hanani is identified as a seer. Seer is the Hebrew word roay (רֹאֶה, roh-EH) which is an archaic word for prophet, the same root of the Hebrew verb raah (רָאָה, rah-AH), to see. Thus the seer or prophet is one to whom God has granted the vision to see or to perceive a matter, so that he can pass this knowledge on to the intended recipient.

In 1 Kings we have the story of the battle between Syria and Samaria at Aphek. The Israelites were outnumbered greatly by the Syrian forces, as described in 1 Kings 20:27:

“And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present,

and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.”

In the next verse, a prophet comes to deliver a message to King Ahab (1 Kings 20:28):

“And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.”

So Samaria defeated the forces of Syria, who lost 100,000 men in one day. The rest fled into the city of Aphek, where a wall fell upon 27,000 more of the men. King Benhadad of Syria fled into an inner chamber of Aphek. Then we have the following meeting of Benhadad with Ahab (1 Kings 20:31-34):

“And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Benhadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will

restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.”

This covenant was not of God, and so the story continues with a second prophet confronting Ahab (2 Kings 20:35-43):

“And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then he said unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was one of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of my hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.”

So we see that God gave this prophet the ability to make up a parable to get King Ahab to declare his own judgment for letting the king of Syria go free.

May you have a good month, and I as I am writing these words on Saturday morning, I say Shabbat Shalom to you and your family!