

# [The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash](#)

## **The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion**

---

### **Shiur #86: The Storm Part 2: Eliyahu's Journey to His Place of Ascent (continued)**

#### **5. The "Three and Four" Model in our Narrative, and its Meaning**

The description of Eliyahu's journey to the place where he is to be taken up and the description of what happens thereafter are built on a doubled literary model of "three and four". (As we have pointed out in the past, there are also other parts of the Eliyahu narratives that follow the same model.)

An examination of the description in verses 1-8 shows that it is composed of three units that repeat themselves, and these serve as a preparation for the appearance of the fourth unit, which is the climax of the next literary unit, starting in verse 9.

The following schematic presentation shows the parallels between the first three units and the fourth:

I

\* From Gilgal to Beit El:

... Eliyahu went, and Elisha, from Gilgal.

And Eliyahu said to Elisha: Remain here, I pray you, for God has sent me as far as Beit El.

And Elisha said: As God lives, and by your life, I shall not forsake you.  
And they went down to Beit El.

\* In Beit El:

And the apprentice prophets who were in Beit El came out to Elisha and said to him:

Did you know that today God will take your master from over your head?  
And he said: Yes, I know it; be silent.

II

\* From Beit El to Yericho:

And Eliyahu said to him: Elisha – remain here, I pray you, for God has sent me to Yericho.

And he said: As God lives, and by your life, I shall not forsake you. And they came to Yericho.

\* In Yericho:

And the apprentice prophets who were in Yericho approached Elisha and said to him:

Did you know that today God will take your master from over your head?

And he said: Yes, I know it; be silent.

### III

\* From Yericho to the Yarden:

And Eliyahu said to him: Remain here, I pray you, for God has sent me to the Yarden.

And he said: As God lives, and by your life, I shall not forsake you. And they went, the two of them.

\* At the Yarden:

And fifty men of the apprentice prophets went and stood facing them, at a distance, and the two of them stood at the Yarden.

And Eliyahu took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water, and they were parted to one side and to the other, and the two of them passed through on dry ground.

### IV

\* From the Yarden to the other side:

And it was, as they were passing over, that Eliyahu said to Elisha:

Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken away from you.

And Elisha said: I pray you, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me...

And it was, as they were walking along and talking, that behold – there was a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they parted them from one another, and Eliyahu ascended in a storm to heaven.

And Elisha saw it...

\* Back at the Yarden:

... And he went back and he stood at the bank of the Yarden,

And he took the mantle of Eliyahu... and he struck the water, and they were parted to one side and to the other, and Elisha passed over.

And the apprentice prophets who were in Yericho, facing them, saw him, and they said:

The spirit of Eliyahu rests upon Elisha.

And they came towards him and they bowed themselves to the ground before him.

From the schematic presentation above it is clear that the "three and four" model is doubled in our narrative – i.e., each of the three units (I, II, III) comprises two parts (\*): the first records a fixed dialogue between Eliyahu and Elisha ("Remain here, I pray you, for God has sent me... As God lives, and by your life, I shall not forsake you"). In all three instances, the dialogue concludes with Eliyahu and Elisha proceeding together to the next station on their journey.

The second part of each of the three units describes the activity of the apprentice prophets, who are aware of the secret of Eliyahu's journey on this day. In contrast to the corresponding first part of each unit, where the dialogue between Eliyahu and Elisha is described as they make their way from one station to the next, the activity of the apprentice prophets is fixed, in each case, in one place – in Beit El, in Yericho, or at the Yarden. In the first two units, the same emotional dialogue between the apprentice prophets and Elisha is repeated in exactly the same words: "Did you know that today God will take your master from over your head? And he said: Yes, I know it; be silent." In the third unit, this dialogue is not repeated. Its absence arises from the circumstances of the plot. The station that follows Yericho is the Yarden, which is not a place of habitation; apprentice prophets do not normally dwell there, as they do in Beit El and Yericho. Nevertheless, right now there are apprentice prophets even at the Yarden, and they are most interested in Eliyahu's imminent departure (verse 7): "And fifty men of the apprentice prophets went and stood facing them, at a distance." From where did they go? Obviously, from Yericho. These fifty apprentice prophets are the same ones who were described in Yericho previously, in the second unit. Clearly, then, there is no point in repeating the same conversation that has already been held between the apprentice prophets and Elisha in Yericho.

For what reason do these fifty "sons of prophets" come to the Yarden? They come in order to be present at the closest possible spot that they dare to approach – "facing them, at a distance" – to the place where Eliyahu will be taken up, on the other side of the Yarden. From their observation point they view Eliyahu parting the Yarden using his mantle, and they see him crossing over on dry land together with Elisha. At this point, it seems, the two characters disappear from view.

Thus, the description of the activity of the apprentice prophets in the third unit differs from the description of their activity in the previous two units. There, they held a dialogue with Elisha, while here they watch in silence as Eliyahu and Elisha pass over the Yarden, after it has been parted in a miraculous manner. What is common to all three units is that the apprentice prophets, who are moved at the knowledge that on this day God will take Eliyahu from them, attempt to draw close to this mysterious event in different ways, but remain limited in their success. In Beit El and in Yericho

their desire to be part of what is going on is manifest in their dialogue with Elisha, who commands them – "Be silent." At the Yarden the same desire is reflected in their silent vigil "facing them, at a distance" from the place where Eliyahu and Elisha crossed over, and their continued observation of the two characters as they grow more distant. Furthermore, the apprentice prophets are aware in all three units that Elisha not only knows, as they do, the secret of Eliyahu's journey on this day, but he is the only one who is permitted to accompany Eliyahu on his journey to the final station. In the third unit this knowledge is further reinforced: they view Elisha proceeding together with Eliyahu to the place – hidden from their eyes - where he will be taken up.

Let us now discuss the fourth unit of the story, representing the climax of the three preceding ones.

Just as the first three units are divided into two separate parts (the dialogue between Eliyahu and Elisha, and the description of the activity of the apprentice prophets), so the fourth unit – which complements and completes them - is likewise composed of two parts. The complement to the first part of each of the three units (the repeated dialogue between Eliyahu and Elisha) is to be found in the description of the fourth and final dialogue between them, in verses 9-12. This dialogue too, like its predecessors, is carried out as the two characters are on the move: "**And it was, as they were passing over**, that Eliyahu said to Elisha..." (verse 9); "And it was, **as they were walking along and talking**, that behold – there was a chariot of fire..." (verse 11).

Unlike the preceding three units, Elisha's accompaniment of Eliyahu in the fourth unit invites no attempt at protest on Eliyahu's part, and the content of their dialogue is the opposite of what it has been until now. Eliyahu rewards Elisha for accompanying him, and asks him: "What shall I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha's response – "I pray you, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me" – is granted him when Eliyahu's condition is fulfilled: "If you see me being taken from you, then it shall be so for you."

The description of Eliyahu's ascent in a storm to heaven, and the dialogue between him and Elisha that preceded it, are not connected to the apprentice prophets (i.e., to the second part of the preceding three units). It takes place out of their sight, and their presence at the Yarden in the third unit makes no contribution to what happens between Eliyahu and Elisha at the place where Eliyahu is taken up.

What, then, is the complement to the description of the activity of the apprentice prophets in the preceding three units? It would seem that the section we are

looking for is the description of Elisha's return to the western side of the Yarden, where the apprentice prophets are waiting, and where they welcome him, as described in verses 13-15.

The presence of the apprentice prophets at the Yarden and their observation of Eliyahu and Elisha crossing over, as described in the third unit, represent the necessary background and buildup to this fourth unit. The description of Elisha crossing back over the Yarden, alone, in the fourth unit, clearly parallels the description of Elijah's crossing in the previous unit. What is important to note, however, is that just as in Eliyahu's case the miraculous act is performed before the eyes of the apprentice prophets, so likewise in the fourth unit, Elisha's crossing of the Yarden is witnessed by them (verse 15): "And the apprentice prophets, who were in Yericho facing them, saw him."

This parallel between the fourth unit and the third, with regard to the observation by the apprentice prophets, is completed through the parallel between the fourth unit and the first two. Just as in the first two units the words of the apprentice prophets concern the bond between Eliyahu and Elisha – "Did you know that today God will take your master from over your head?" – so in the fourth unit the subject of their speech remains the same: "Eliyahu's spirit rests upon Elisha." And just as in the first two units we read, "The apprentice prophets who were in Beit El/Yericho came out to/approached Elisha," so in the fourth unit we read, "They came to meet him." However, in the first two units they approach Elisha with a view to talking with him, while in the fourth unit – as in the third – there is no dialogue between them. "They came to meet him, and they prostrated themselves to the ground before him" – in silence.

(to be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish