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The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shiur #87: The Storm Part 2: Eliyahu's Journey to His Place of Ascent (continued)

By Rav Elchanan Samet

6. The Significance of the Appearance of the "Double" Model

Wherever we encounter the literary model of "three and four" in *Tanakh*, we must ask in what way it contributes to the subject of the unit in which it appears. In our case, where the model is doubled, we must ask whether this doubling serves a single purpose or two purposes.

The recurrence of some event in a biblical narrative three times in succession creates a "*chazaka*" (an established precedent) and negates the possibility of the characters perceiving it as coincidence. A three-fold repetition affects a change in their consciousness and prepares them for the event that constitutes the fourth link in the chain. At the same time, the repetition of an event over and over again creates a delay in the progression of the plot, facilitating the ripening of some process or development, as a build-up to the climax that comes in the fourth link.

Let us examine each part of the "double model" in our narrative. The difference in the subject of the two parts of the model is clear. The first part is focused on the relationship between Eliyahu and Elisha, while the second part describes the relationship between the apprentice prophets and Elisha.

In the first part of the model, then, it would seem that the three-fold repetition of the dialogue between Eliyahu and Elisha is meant to establish Elisha's decisiveness and his stoic withstanding of the test that Eliyahu presents him with again and again. It is this that makes Elisha worthy of the change in Eliyahu's attitude towards him, in the fourth link; it is this that causes Eliyahu to view him as his successor in the role of the prophet of the generation. (We shall elaborate on this point in a future *shiur*.)

This change in Eliyahu's attitude towards Elisha begins to make itself felt already in the third unit. After Elisha repeats his oath for the third time, we are not told that he and Eliyahu "came to the Yarden," in keeping with the model of the two preceding units. Rather, we read: "They proceeded; **the two of them**" (6), meaning –

"in mutual agreement." The same impression arises from the subsequent verses – (7) "**They both** stood at the Yarden"; (8) "**They both** passed through on dry ground." This implied accord, born of Elisha's stubborn insistence on accompanying his master, bears fruit in the dialogue between them in the fourth unit. The nature of this dialogue is the opposite of the substance of their conversations in the preceding units, and it is this that ultimately leads to Elisha's succession with "double the spirit" of his master.

Let us now turn our attention to the second part of the "three and four" model. In the first two links, the apprentice prophets in Beit-El and in Yericho approach Elisha and ask him: "Do you know that today God will take your master from over your head?" Apparently, this question is meant as way of engaging Elisha in discussion, and showing him, with great emotion, that they are aware of the meaning of Eliyahu's appearance in their cities. Elisha's response – "Yes, I know it; be silent," like the entire encounter between him and them, testifies to his superiority, or chosenness, in relation to the apprentice prophets. It is he who arrives with Eliyahu in the cities of these apprentice prophets, and he is the only one who leaves the cities as Eliyahu's escort.

In the third link, the apprentice prophets in Yericho dare to emerge from their city in the footsteps of Eliyahu and Elisha, and to follow them to the Yarden, at an appropriate distance. This link therefore brings the apprentice prophets closer to the secret event where Eliyahu will be taken up. Is Elisha's status further elevated in their eyes at this stage? It would seem that the answer is in the affirmative. On the bank of the Yarden, the apprentice prophets see that Elisha's accompaniment of Eliyahu does not end there; he proceeds with him to the other side of the Yarden, to the place where Eliyahu will be taken up. That which actually happens there – Eliyahu being taken up to heaven in a storm, and Elisha receiving a double portion of his spirit – they cannot see.

The presence of the apprentice prophets at the Yarden, in the third link, prepares the ground for the events of the fourth link, which affect a fundamental change in their attitude towards Elisha. Up until now, Elisha has been shown to be superior to them, since he is Eliyahu's chosen attendant, accompanying him on his final journey. Now, however, as they see him returning alone towards the Yarden, and repeating the same miracle that Eliyahu had recently performed there, holding Eliyahu's mantle in his hands, the apprentice prophets understand that the attendant has become the prophet of the generation. They understand that now that Eliyahu has been taken from them, his spirit rests upon Elisha.

It is therefore the fourth link that changes the attitude of the apprentice prophets towards Elisha, filling in that which they were not able to see – all that happened at

the place where Eliyahu was taken up. Even though they did not hear directly Elisha's request of Eliyahu ("I pray you, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me"), nor Eliyahu's conditional agreement ("If you see me being taken from you, it will be so for you"), and even though they do not witness the fulfillment of this condition ("And Eliyahu went up in a storm to heaven, and Elisha saw it"), they deduce on the basis of what they can see, that "Eliyahu's spirit rests upon Elisha."

As in the first two links, they once again approach Elisha. Now, however, they no longer regard him as the attendant who may be drawn into conversation on matters that are meaningful to them. Now they silently bow to the ground before him, thereby wordlessly expression their recognition of him as the new prophet of the generation.

Thus, the second part of the "three and four" model serves as a framework for a description of the change in the attitude of the apprentice prophets towards Elisha, up until they accept him as the prophet who has taken the place of his master. At the beginning of the process, in the first two links, they clearly regard him as Eliyahu's chosen attendant. In the third link, his status is further elevated in their eyes, in terms of his connection with Eliyahu, and the ground is readied for the revolution in their view of him as Eliyahu's prophetic inheritor. The "revolution" is completed with his appearance before them in the fourth link, as the next prophet of the generation.

Translated by Kaeren Fish