

[The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash](#)

The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shiur #95: The Storm Part 7: Eliyahu Lives On (Continued)

By Rav Elchanan Samet

2. Appearances of Eliyahu in *Tanakh* After His Ascent

Explicit accounts of Eliyahu's appearances after the time of his ascent to heaven appear already in *Tanakh*, in two different sources, concerning two periods that are very distant from each other.

A. The Letter from Eliyahu

Chapter 21 of *II Divrei Ha-yamim* records the period of the reign of King Yehoram of Yehuda, son of Yehoshafat and grandson of Asa. (He should not be confused with his contemporary and kinsman, Yehoram of Yisrael, who ascended to the throne upon the death of his older brother, Achazya; both Yehoram and Achazya were sons of Achav.) Yehoram of Yehuda is of Davidic stock, but he marries into the House of Achav and follows their ways (v. 6):

He went in the way of the kings of Yisrael, as the House of Achav had done - for Achav's daughter was his wife – and he did evil in the eyes of God.

The beginning of his reign is marked with a killing spree, as recorded there (v. 4):

And Yehoram took over his father's kingdom, and he grew strong, and he killed all of his brethren by the sword, and also some of the princes of Yisrael.

Yehoram receives a letter of prophetic rebuke:

(12) A letter came to him from Eliyahu the Prophet, saying: "So says Lord, God of David, your father: 'Since you have followed neither the ways of Yehoshafat, your father, nor the ways of Asa, King of Yehuda;

(13) and you have followed the ways of the kings of Yisrael, and have caused Yehuda and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to become unfaithful, like the unfaithfulness of the House of Achav; and you have also killed your paternal brothers, who were better than you;

(14) behold – God will strike your people and your children and your wives and all of your property with a great plague,

(15) and you will be greatly ill with an illness of the bowels, until your bowels fall out because of the illness...

Later on in the same chapter, the text describes the complete fulfillment of this prophecy.

Many commentators note that fact that Yehoram's ascent to the throne of his father, Yehoshafat, came several years after Eliyahu had already ascended to heaven. The earliest source to address this question is a *midrash* in *Seder Olam Rabba*, Ch. 17:

Achazyah, son of Achav, reigned two years, and in the second year of Achazyah's reign, Eliyahu was taken up...

Then, when Yehoshafat died, Yehoram took the throne...

"A letter came to him from Eliyahu" – it had already been seven years since Eliyahu's passing.

The early commentators do not note an exact number of years, but they prove, from the chronology of the events, that in the time of Yehoshafat, Yehoram's father, Elisha was already the prophet of the generation, having succeeded Eliyahu. Clearly, then, the reign of Yehoram came after Eliyahu had already ascended to heaven. The Ibn Ezra comments as follows, on the concluding verse of *Terei Asar* (*Malakhi* 3:24):

I now conclude the commentary on this book with the matter of Eliyahu [mentioned in the previous verse]. We find that he lived during the time of Achazyahu ben Achav, and it is written that Yehoram ben Achav, as well as Yehoshafat, inquired of Elisha the Prophet. It is written there (in *II Melakhim* 3:11), "Here is Elisha, son of Shafat, who poured water over the hands of Eliyahu." This indicates that [Eliyahu] had already ascended in a storm to heaven, for the text does not say: pours water [in the present]; furthermore, Elisha did not part from Eliyahu, after ministering to him, until Eliyahu's ascent. Here we find written, after the death of Yehoshafat, in the days of his son Yehoram: "A letter came to him from Eliyahu the

Prophet." This tells us that **then** [i.e., after his ascent], Eliyahu wrote to him and sent to him. Had the letter been written prior to his ascent, the text would have said: He found [a letter], or: a letter came to him that Eliyahu had left behind. There is also no doubt that in the days of our holy Sages he was seen. May God in His mercy speed his prophecy and soon bring about his coming.

The Radak summarizes the Ibn Ezra's words in his own commentary on *Divrei Ha-yamim*, and the Ralbag adopts a similar logical argument, elaborating on two points that are necessary to complete the proof:

A. Eliyahu's spirit rested on Elisha, making him prophet in his stead, only after he was taken from him, as becomes clear from an examination of what is written in *Sefer Melakhim*. Then, Elisha was anointed as prophet in place of Eliyahu, as God had told Eliyahu (*I Melakhim* 19:16). That verse also tells us that he would become a prophet only when Eliyahu ceased to be a prophet.

B. If we do not accept this assumption [that Eliyahu's letter was written after his ascent] then we are forced to posit that Eliyahu prophesized, before this death, that this would be the case [that Yehoram would kill his brothers] and that this would already make him liable for the punishment noted (vv. 14-15). However, we cannot propose this, for were it so, the punishment for the sin would have been decreed before the person had sinned, and he would have no choice but to sin; this goes against all the roots of the Torah.

What Conclusion Arises from All of This?

The Ralbag uses this as proof for his exegetical approach to Eliyahu's ascent in *Sefer Melakhim*:

It should be clear from this that Eliyahu did not die when he was taken from over Elisha's head... It is clear that this letter, which came from Eliyahu to Yehoram ben Yehoshafat after the death of Yehoshafat, was after Eliyahu had been taken from over Elisha's head. Once this matter is clear, it turns out that Eliyahu was, of necessity, alive at the time when Yehoram killed his brothers, which was after he had been taken from over Elisha's head... Thus we find no indication that Eliyahu died... and his life was wondrously extended, in a miraculous way, as we noted in *Sefer Melakhim*.

According to the Chatam Sofer, too, Eliyahu's letter presents no problem: the angel Eliyahu was sent to write the letter of rebuke to Yehoram ben Yehoshafat, and for this purpose he was revealed in "this world."

But how does the Radak explain the matter? To his view, we recall, Eliyahu's "ascent" was simply a special manner of death. How, then, could Eliyahu have written this letter after his own death? The Radak explains:

"A letter came to him from Eliyahu the Prophet" – this was after he had ascended. What this means is that Eliyahu was revealed in a prophetic vision to one of the prophets, and he put in his mouth the words of this letter and told him to write them in a letter and to bring the letter to Yehoram. Then [the prophet] told [Yehoram] that this letter had been sent to him by Eliyahu, in order that Yehoram would think that the letter had come to him from the heavens, be contrite, and know that he had performed great evil.

This is difficult to understand. Where do we find any instance of the spirit of a dead prophet appearing to a living prophet, placing words of prophecy in his mouth, and even going so far as to command him to perform certain actions? Prophecy is supposed to be a connection between God and the prophet, with no one else involved.

It seems, then, that *Sefer Divrei Ha-yamim* represents the earliest instance of Eliyahu's revelation after his ascent, taking place not very long afterward. This also serves to strengthen the impression created by the literal text in *Sefer Melakhim*, that Eliyahu does not die. However we interpret the details of his ascent, what the text appears to be telling us is that Eliyahu continues to exist even afterwards, and obviously his existence has a purpose: he is entrusted to continue his role as an active force in the reality of human history. Here, in *Sefer Divrei Ha-yamim*, his role seems to complement the mission that he represents throughout *Sefer Melakhim*: he is the prophet who rebukes the House of Achav and foretells its end. Indeed, in his commentary on *Sefer Divrei Ha-yamim*, the Malbim writes:

"A letter from Eliyahu" – this was after he had been taken, and it appears that he is still alive, appearing in this world from time to time, as accepted in the traditions of the Sages. Since Eliyahu foretold the end of the House of Achav, and since [Yehoram ben Yehoshafat] was Achav's son-in-law, his prophecy applied to him too, such that he would be included in the death of the House of Achav.

(To be continued)
Translated by Kaeren Fish