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

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### **Shiur #96: The Storm Part 7: Eliyahu Lives On (Continued)**

**By Rav Elchanan Samet**

#### **2. Eliyahu's Mission in *Sefer Malakhi***

In Eliyahu's next appearance in *Tanakh* (*Malakhi* 3:22-24), he is given an entirely different mission:

(22) Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant, whom I commanded at Chorev for all of Israel, statutes and judgments.

(23) Behold, I shall send to you Eliyahu the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome Day of God.

(24) He shall restore the heart of fathers to their children, and the heart of children to their fathers – lest I come and strike the land with a curse.

These are the last words of prophecy recorded in *Tanakh*. They conclude the period of prophecy – both in the sense of being uttered by Malakhi, the last of the prophets chronologically, and in the sense of their location at the end of *Terei Asar*, the final volume of the division of Scripture known as "Prophets."

The Malbim offers the following explanation as to the connection between the exhortation in verse 22, "Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant," and the two verses that follow:

By concluding his prophecy with these words — representing the last prophecy, following which no prophet or seer will prophesize until the Time of the End — he tells them that from now on they should not expect to attain God's word through prophecy; they should only remember Moshe's Torah, to do all that is written in it, and it will instruct them as to what to do. "Behold I shall send..." – (meaning, that the above applies) until just prior to the coming of the great Day of God, when prophecy will return to [the Jewish nation] through the greatest of the prophets, Eliyahu the Prophet, who will be revealed then.

This is not the only place in *Tanakh* where a person who has lived and died then reappears at a later time. Yirmeyahu (31:14-16) utters the following prophecy:

(14) So says God: "A voice is heard in Rama, wailing and bitter weeping – Rachel is crying for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, for they are gone."

(15) So says God: "Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your actions," says God, "and they shall return from the land of the enemy."

(16) "And there is hope for your end," says God, "and the children will return to their border."

Here, however, at least on the literal level, we must concur with the Mahari Kara, that "this is not said to Rachel, the wife of Yaakov, in the literal sense." The Malbim comments, "The text depicts Rachel as the matriarch of the children, crying out over her two sons who are exiled."

Similarly, we find King David mentioned in some prophecies about the redemption:

Thereafter, the Israelites will repent and seek God, their God, and David, their king. (*Hoshea* 3:5)

And My servant, David, will be king over them, and there will be a single shepherd for them all. (*Yechezkel* 37:24)

These prophets are clearly not referring to David himself, but rather to one of his descendants, whose name is as yet unknown to us; therefore, he is referred to by the name of his ancestor, founder of the Davidic dynasty.

In the verse in *Sefer Malakhi*, by contrast, Eliyahu is invoked not in the metaphorical sense; nor as a literary depiction; nor as the founder of a dynasty, such that his name could be used with reference to one of the prophets that come later. Here, Malakhi is talking about an actual appearance of Eliyahu, and a specific, defined mission that he must fulfill. Admittedly, this mission will be carried out towards the End of Days, but still within human and historical reality, and the mission is clear: he must "restore the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers." What is the meaning of this appearance of Eliyahu before the coming of God's great day? Was he not taken up in a storm to the heavens?

Once again, the text provides support for our understanding of the narrative in *Melakhim* as indicating that Eliyahu did not die. He still has tasks to fulfill – both in his own generation (as recorded in *II Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:12-15) and at the End of Days (as prophesized by Malakhi).

In the interval between these two missions, Eliyahu appears frequently to the Sages, as recorded at length in Talmudic and Midrashic literature as well as later works.

Once again we ask: how does the Radak explain these verses in Malakhi? We recall that according to his understanding of *Sefer Melakhim*, Eliyahu died; how, then, can he appear in the future as a prophet sent before the great Day of God? The Radak explains:

"Behold, I shall send you" - for your benefit I shall send you Eliyahu the Prophet. What this means is that God will restore his soul, which has ascended to heaven, to a body, created like his original body. For his original body had returned to the ground, with his ascent – each element returning to its place. After reviving him in a body, God will send him to Israel before the Day of Judgment, which is the "great and awesome Day of God," and he will adjure fathers and children alike to repent and return to God with all their hearts.

Thus, according to the Radak, there will be a "revival of the dead" for Eliyahu alone; he will arise and carry out the mission of restoring the hearts of the fathers to the children. But here we must ask, why could God not appoint a prophet of that future generation to carry out the task? And if, for whatever reason, there is a specific need for a prophet from the early generations, why is it Eliyahu who is miraculously revived, rather than some other prophet – Moshe, perhaps, or Yeshayahu?

Is it coincidental that only Eliyahu appears and is active after leaving this world – in dispatching a letter to Yehoram ben Yehoshafat, and in coming to Israel before the coming of the great Day of God? Can we deny the clear connection between that which is written in *Divrei Ha-yamim* and *Malakhi*, and the description of Eliyahu being taken up **live** to the heavens? Sometimes, the meaning of a source cannot be clarified from its own context alone. The two opaque sources in question – the account in *Divrei Ha-yamim* and in *Sefer Malakhi* – are examples. It would be difficult to understand these sources, discussing a prophet who has already left this world, without going back to the nature of that prophet, and especially the manner in which he left the world. There lies the key to understanding his reappearance later on. One prophecy connects to the other, each sheds light on the other, and they lead to a single conclusion: Eliyahu did not die.

It would seem that this connection between the description of Eliyahu's ascent to heaven in *Sefer Melakhim* and his future appearance prior to the Day of God in *Sefer Malakhi*, as well as the perception of the whole as a deliberate Divine plan, is noted already in the Apocryphal *Sefer Ben Sira* (48:9-10):

He was taken on high in a storm, and with the heavenly troops of fire.  
Written as ready, for the time to cut off fury before anger, to restore the heart of fathers to children and to prepare the tribes of Israel.

Moshe Tzevi Segal explains in his edition of *Ben Sira*: "The subject of the word 'written' is Eliyahu (ibid., v. 1)... in other words, the one about whom it is written that he is ready for the Time of the End, which is the Day of God." Where is it written concerning Eliyahu that he is ready and waiting for the Time of the End? The answer to this lies in the connection drawn by Ben Sira: the fact that Eliyahu is taken up in a storm and troops of fire to heaven, and his appearance in *Sefer Malakhi* at the End of Days to prepare the tribes of Israel at the time of their redemption, show that he is taken in this manner precisely so that he will be ready, from that time until the time of the Redemption, and this intention is as clear as though it had been explicitly written in the text.

Concerning Eliyahu's appearance in *Sefer Malakhi*, too, it is not necessary to accept the Ralbag's literal explanation, contending that Eliyahu lives on and is hidden from sight until the time of his revelation. Rather, we may return to the more complex view of the Chatam Sofer, who maintains that Eliyahu did not die like any normal person, but rather turned into an angel. Since then, he stands ready to perform missions entrusted to him at various times. Sometimes he executes these missions in a "spiritual" manner; at other times, in his bodily garb.

This interpretation, viewing Eliyahu after his ascent as an "angel," is given further support from *Sefer Malakhi* itself. At the beginning of that same prophecy (3:1-3), we find a description that bears several parallels to the conclusion:

- (1) "**Behold, I shall send My angel (*malakhi*),** and he shall clear a path *before Me*, and suddenly God Whom you seek will come to His Temple. And the angel of the covenant (*malakh ha-berit*) in whom you delight – behold, he shall come," says God of Hosts.
- (2) But who can bear the day of his coming, and who shall be standing when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like the washers' soap.

(3) And he shall sit like a refiner and purifier of silver, and shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them like gold and like silver, and they shall offer to God an offering in righteousness...

(23) "**Behold, I shall send** to you Eliyahu the Prophet, *before the coming* of the great and awesome Day of God...

On the basis of this parallel, some commentators have identified Eliyahu, who is sent before the Day of God, as the angel of God who is sent to clear a path for God, before He suddenly comes to His Temple. Eliyahu, then, is "the angel of the covenant."

The Mahari Kara offers the following commentary on verse 23 at the end of *Malakhi*: "This explains what is written before, 'Behold, I shall send My angel, and he shall clear a path before Me.'" The Radak, too, raises this as a possible explanation: "He says 'angel of the covenant' with reference to Eliyahu."

Admittedly, in the above presentation of the two prophecies, we note a vast difference in the purpose of the appearance of the angel of the covenant – to purify and purge the children of Levi with fire – and the purpose of Eliyahu's appearance – to restore the hearts of fathers to children. Possibly, the tension between the implications of the beginning of the chapter and the implications of its conclusion (assuming that both are speaking about Eliyahu) is what gives rise to the discussion between Tanna'im that is recorded in the final *mishna* (8:7) in *Massekhet Eduyyot*. The nature of the coming of the "angel of the covenant" at the beginning of the prophecy presents a difficulty: he comes in order to purge people, and the children of Levi (i.e., the priests) with fire, to reveal the purity of their lineage, and it will be difficult to withstand the day of his coming. Eliyahu, at the end of the same prophecy, comes to make peace between fathers and children, thereby preventing God's curse from striking the land. The Mishna teaches:

Rabbi Yehoshua said: "I learned from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, who in turn heard it from his teacher, and his teacher from the teacher before him, all the way back to Moshe at Sinai, that Eliyahu does not come to declare people impure or pure, nor to distance people or bring them close, but rather to distance those who have come close by force, and to draw near those who have been distanced by force."

Rabbi Yehuda said: "To bring close, but not to distance."

Rabbi Shimon says: "To solve (halakhic) disputes."

The Sages said: "Neither to distance nor to bring close, but rather to make peace in the world. As it is written, 'Behold, I shall send to you Eliyahu the Prophet... and he will restore the heart of fathers to children, and the heart of children to their fathers.'

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish