

Stones and Stories #8

Eliyahu and Ahab

The Drought

Elijah the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding.” The word of the LORD came to him: “Leave this place; turn eastward and go into hiding by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You will drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” He proceeded to do as the LORD had bidden: he went, and he stayed by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening, and he drank from the wadi. After some time the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land. And the word of the LORD came to him: “Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon, and stay there; I have designated a widow there to feed you.” (Kings I 17)

Eliyahu Prophet of Fire

1 Then Elijah arose, a prophet like fire, and his word burned like a torch. (Ben Sira 48)

פירוש דון יצחק אברבנלי בספר מלכים : הנה אם כן לפי שמשה אהב את הארץ הנבחרת וגדל חסוקו אליה, נגמר בתוכה, אמונה אליו שלא היה לו עמה אותה אהבה וחשך, אבל היה ההפר שהיה שונה אותה ואת אנשיה ומתפלל על צערה, והיה כל מאודו עם האש ולכן הורידו בהר הכרמל ונראה לו בחורב והורידו על שרי החמישים, היה מזקתו שלא נגמר בארץ ולא קובל בתוכה וקובל בתוך האש שבא לקבל את פניו

The Baal and the Rain

Ugaritic poem about Baal found in Ras Shamra, 15th-14th c BCE:

“parched is the furrow of soil . . Parched is El’s soil furrow,: Baal neglects the furrow of his tillage. Where is powerful Baal? Where is the prince, lord of the earth?”

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil— I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. (Devarim 11)

הושע ב:יח-יט וְהִיא בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא נָאַמֵּדְהָזֶה תִּקְרָאִי אִישׁי וְלֹא-תִּקְרָאִי לִי עוֹד בָּעָלִי:

And in that day —declares the LORD— You will call [Me] Ishi, And no more will you call Me Baali.

The Standoff at Mount Carmel

When Ahab caught sight of Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” He retorted, “It is not I who have brought trouble on Israel, but you and your father’s House, by forsaking the commandments of the LORD and going after the Baalim. Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” Ahab sent orders to all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; and if Baal, follow him!” But the people answered him not a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I am the only prophet of the LORD left, while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Let two young bulls be given to us. Let them choose one bull, cut it up, and lay it on the wood, but let them not apply fire; I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and will not apply fire. You will then invoke your god by name, and I will invoke the LORD by name; and let us agree: the god who responds with fire, that one is God.” And all the people answered, “Very good!” Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one bull and prepare it first, for you are the majority; invoke your god by name, but apply no fire.” They took the bull that was given them; they prepared it, and invoked Baal by name from morning until noon, shouting, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound, and none who responded; so they performed a hopping dance about the altar that had been set up. When noon came, Elijah mocked them, saying, “Shout louder! After all, he is a god. But he may be in conversation, he may be detained, or he may be on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and will wake up.” So they shouted louder, and gashed themselves with knives and spears, according to their practice, until the blood streamed over them. When noon passed, they kept raving until the hour of presenting the meal offering. Still there was no sound, and none who responded or heeded. Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come closer to me”; and all the people came closer to him. He repaired the damaged altar of the LORD. Then Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob—to whom the word of the LORD had come: “Israel shall be your name”— and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. Around the altar he made a trench large enough for two seahs of seed. He laid out the wood, and he cut up the bull and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it over the burnt offering and the wood.” Then he said, “Do it a second time”; and they did it a second time. “Do it a third time,” he said; and they did it a third time. The water ran down around the altar, and even the trench was filled with water. When it was time to present the meal offering, the prophet Elijah came forward and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! Let it be known today

that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your bidding. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God; for You have turned their hearts backward." Then fire from the LORD descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth; and it licked up the water that was in the trench. When they saw this, all the people flung themselves on their faces and cried out: "The LORD alone is God, The LORD alone is God!" Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal, let not a single one of them get away." They seized them, and Elijah took them down to the Wadi Kishon and slaughtered them there. Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a rumbling of [approaching] rain," and Ahab went up to eat and drink. Elijah meanwhile climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, crouched on the ground, and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, "Go up and look toward the Sea." He went up and looked and reported, "There is nothing." Seven times [Elijah] said, "Go back," and the seventh time, [the servant] reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising in the west." Then [Elijah] said, "Go say to Ahab, 'Hitch up [your chariot] and go down before the rain stops you.'" Meanwhile the sky grew black with clouds; there was wind, and a heavy downpour fell; Ahab mounted his chariot and drove off to Jezreel. The hand of the LORD had come upon Elijah. He tied up his skirts and ran in front of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. (Kings 1 18)

My Father, My Father, the Chariots of Israel and Their Horsemen

1. King Hadadezer himself commanded 1,200 chariots, 1,200 horsemen and 20,000 soldiers;
2. King Irhuleni of Hamath commanded 700 chariots, 700 horsemen and 10,000 soldiers;
3. King Ahab of Israel sent 2,000 chariots and 10,000 soldiers;
4. The Kingdom of KUR Gu-a-a identified as Quwē-Cilicia sent 500 soldiers;
5. The land of KUR Mu-us-ra-^[a] identified as Masura, which is the outlet of the Düden River, sent 1,000 soldiers;
6. The land of Irqanata (Tell Arqa) sent 10 chariots and 10,000 soldiers;
7. King Matinu Baal of Arwad sent 200 soldiers;
8. The land of Usannata^[b] (in the Mount Lebanon region) sent 200 soldiers;
9. King Adunu Baal of Ušnatū (in the Syrian Coastal Mountain Range)^[5] – figures lost;
10. King Gindibu of Arabia sent 1000 Camel cavalry;
11. King Ba'asa, son of Ruhubi, of the land of Ammon sent 100 soldiers.

הרשות גם ירשת?

[The following events] occurred sometime afterward: Naboth the Jezreelite owned a vineyard in Jezreel, adjoining the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it as a vegetable garden, since it is right next to my palace. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange; or, if you prefer, I will pay you the price in money." But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give up to you what I have inherited from my fathers!" Ahab went home dispirited and sullen because of the answer that

Naboth the Jezreelite had given him: "I will not give up to you what I have inherited from my fathers!" He lay down on his bed and turned away his face, and he would not eat. His wife Jezebel came to him and asked him, "Why are you so dispirited that you won't eat?" So he told her, "I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and proposed to him, 'Sell me your vineyard for money, or if you prefer, I'll give you another vineyard in exchange'; but he answered, 'I will not give my vineyard to you.'" His wife Jezebel said to him, "Now is the time to show yourself king over Israel. Rise and eat something, and be cheerful; I will get the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you." So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived in the same town with Naboth. In the letters she wrote as follows: "Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the front of the assembly. And seat two scoundrels opposite him, and let them testify against him: 'You have reviled God and king!' Then take him out and stone him to death." His townsmen—the elders and nobles who lived in his town—did as Jezebel had instructed them, just as was written in the letters she had sent them: They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the front of the assembly. Then the two scoundrels came and sat down opposite him; and the scoundrels testified against Naboth publicly as follows: "Naboth has reviled God and king." Then they took him outside the town and stoned him to death. Word was sent to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death." As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Go and take possession of the vineyard which Naboth the Jezreelite refused to sell you for money; for Naboth is no longer alive, he is dead." When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out for the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Go down and confront King Ahab of Israel who [resides] in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard; he has gone down there to take possession of it. Say to him, 'Thus said the LORD: Would you murder and take possession? Thus said the LORD: In the very place where the dogs lapped up Naboth's blood, the dogs will lap up your blood too.'" Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy?" "Yes, I have found you," he replied. "Because you have committed yourself to doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD (Kings I 21)

Eliyahu and Ahab: The Aftermath

Joram ordered, "Hitch up [the chariot]!" They hitched up his chariot; and King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah went out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu. They met him at the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. When Joram saw Jehu, he asked, "Is all well, Jehu?" But Jehu replied, "How can all be well as long as your mother Jezebel carries on her countless harlotries and sorceries?" Thereupon Joram turned his horses around and fled, crying out to Ahaziah, "Treason, Ahaziah!" But Jehu drew his bow and hit Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart; and he collapsed in his chariot. Jehu thereupon ordered his officer Bidkar, "Pick him up and throw him into the

field of Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding side by side behind his father Ahab, when the LORD made this pronouncement about him: ‘I swear, I have taken note of the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons yesterday—declares the LORD. And I will requite you in this plot—declares the LORD.’ So pick him up and throw him unto the plot in accordance with the word of the LORD.” . . .

Jehu went on to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard of it, she painted her eyes with kohl and dressed her hair, and she looked out of the window. As Jehu entered the gate, she called out, “Is all well, Zimri, murderer of your master?” He looked up toward the window and said, “Who is on my side, who?” And two or three eunuchs leaned out toward him. “Throw her down,” he said. They threw her down; and her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled her. Then he went inside and ate and drank. And he said, “Attend to that cursed woman and bury her, for she was a king’s daughter.” So they went to bury her; but all they found of her were the skull, the feet, and the hands. They came back and reported to him; and he said, “It is just as the LORD spoke through His servant Elijah the Tishbite: The dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel in the field of Jezreel; (Melachim Bet, 9)

Into the Whirlwind

Elijah said to him, “Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan.” “As the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you,” he said, and the two of them went on. Fifty men of the disciples of the prophets followed and stood by at a distance from them as the two of them stopped at the Jordan. Thereupon Elijah took his mantle and, rolling it up, he struck the water; it divided to the right and left, so that the two of them crossed over on dry land. As they were crossing, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” Elisha answered, “Let a double portion of your spirit pass on to me.” “You have asked a difficult thing,” he said. “If you see me as I am being taken from you, this will be granted to you; if not, it will not.” As they kept on walking and talking, a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and separated one from the other; and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw it, and he cried out, “Oh, father, father! Israel’s chariots and horsemen!” When he could no longer see him, he grasped his garments and rent them in two. (Kings II, 2)

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD. He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents (Malachi 3)