

"I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" was the statement that the character "Dorothy" said to her dog "Toto" after her home had seemingly been picked up by a whirlwind – a tornado - and minutes later set down in a place called "Oz". "Oz" was the fictional land where everything was supposed to be wonderful in the 1939 movie classic called "The Wizard of Oz".

Though she did not know where she was, we find at the conclusion of the movie that her parents – who were at her bedside, knew all along. She was apparently hit with a rock in the storm and had passed out. Turns out she was just dreaming the entire time.

In the story of Elijah and the Chariot of Fire – the story of a man being caught up on a whirlwind – there is a question about what really happened to him. Some believe he was taken to Heaven and is still there today. Others think not. Why? Because God did not clearly state where the whirlwind dropped him. Thus there is speculation as to where he went – is he in heaven – is he in Judea - is he alive today?

I believe God has given us enough information to figure this out for ourselves, but to do so we must keep two things in mind –

- our conclusion must not be in conflict with other scriptures, and
- our conclusion must be framed within the overall context of the story.

If the scriptures conflict – which according to John 3:13 would be the case if one believed that Elijah is still alive – we have a problem. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to search for the truth.

So were going to attempt to answer these five questions in order to help us draw a correct conclusion. They are:

- Where is heaven?
- What was Elijah's final mission?
- What was meant when YHWH told Elijah to 'anoint' Elisha?
- Where did the Chariot take Elijah?
- What about the mysterious letter that was sent to King Jehoram of Judah some years later?

Where is Heaven?

When speaking of 'heaven', we often think about the place of YHWH's abode. Perhaps the 'Lord's Prayer' comes to mind –

NKJ **Matthew 6:9** " ... Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name ..."

Unfortunately, we seldom consider that the very next stanza states -

NKJ **Matthew 6:10** Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven.

- which could be taken to indicate that the abode of the 'saved' could be God's kingdom on the earth.

So we might say that 'heaven' is wherever YHWH's will is being done, which could imply the Kingdom of God on Earth. But we can be clearer than that.

The scriptures indicate that there are in fact THREE places referred to as 'heaven'.

Paul references that fact in his letter to the believers in Corinth –



NKJ **2 Corinthians 12:2** I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago -- whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows -- such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

Though I cannot explain that verse, it does indicate that Paul believed there were at least three 'heavens'. So what are the three? God defines them in scripture. The first would obviously be the place of God's throne –

NKJ **Isaiah 66:1** Thus says the LORD: "Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool ...

It is from his throne in Heaven that God created everything else. It is from there that God directs the universe, so obviously it is the first not only in order of creation, but also in order of importance. The second and third heavens can be defined by scripture as well, and the scriptures say –

NKJ **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens (*plural*) and the earth.

'Heavens' is translated from the Hebrew word "shamayim" (שָׁמַיִם – 8064) which Strong's defines not only as "Heaven", but also as 'the sky' as well as "the atmosphere". The word simply means "lofty", but appears to be connected to the idea of "water" since in Hebrew it is a combination of the word "mayim" (water) and the Hebrew letter "sheen" which in its original form looked like teeth. What do teeth do? They shred our food! Thus a "sheen" depicts "destruction". This is probably why we see so much destruction "fall from heaven" as a result of water and water vapor - think thunderstorms, tornados, and hurricanes.

God then went on to further define the heavens He was creating -

NKJ **Genesis 1:14** Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years;

This would be the second heaven; the place where the sun, moon, and stars abide. We call that "Outer Space".

Finally, God defined the third heaven –

NKJ **Genesis 1:20** Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens."

This, of course is the atmosphere where the birds and airplanes fly. It is above the earth, but below what we call 'Outer Space' – where rockets fly.

So, we have three heavens which are all described from the beginning, which – by the way - is where we should begin to derive our understanding.

Let's now take a look at Elijah's mission – what was he doing that may have prompted him to be taken up in a fiery chariot.

Elijah's Mission

After destroying the Prophets of Baal and subsequently drawing the wrath of Israel's Queen Jezebel, God sent Elijah to Mount Sinai in order to give him a much-needed lesson in faith. After seeing that Yah's "still small voice" is stronger than the winds, earthquakes, and fire, Elijah was sent by God to do three things -

NKJ **1 Kings 19:15-16** ..."Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. ¹⁶ "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of



Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

I find no record that Elijah actually did anoint Hazael, but you cannot make a case out of silence. Nor did Elijah anoint Jehu unless you consider that he did it much later through Elisha¹. But Elijah did – in a sense - anoint Elisha as the prophet.

Elijah Casts His Mantle on Elisha

In order to understand the Chariot of Fire encounter, it's important to realize that Elijah was sent to anoint Elisha as Elijah's replacement. Apparently, YHWH realized that it was time to move past Elijah – who at that time was probably getting to be somewhat old. It is important to realize that God did not tell Elijah to anoint and then train Elisha, He simply said to anoint him.

To anoint Elisha meant that Elisha was now the prophet. It's just like it was for the High Priest – once he was anointed, He became the High Priest². This is how it happened -

NKJ **1 Kings 19:19-20a** So (Elijah) departed from (Mount Sinai), and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ And he (Elisha) left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow you "

What happened here is important! Elisha walked by Elijah while he was plowing a field and simply tossed his mantle at him. The word for 'threw'; is "shalak" (שָׁלַךְ – 7993) which means "to throw, cast, hurl, fling". It's as if Elijah was ready to retire and move on to other things! But Elisha apparently did not understand. Instead of taking over Elijah's ministry, he began to follow Elijah. He ran to catch up with him to let him know he had a couple of chores to take care of and he'd be right back, but Elijah's response was –

NKJ **1 Kings 19:20b** ... "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

Elijah basically told him to go back and don't follow Him! He was probably thinking "Don't you see what I just did? I threw my mantle to you and now you are Israel's prophet!"

Having the mantle was important. The Hebrew word for "mantle" is "addereth" (אֲדָרֶת – 155) which means "glory, splendor, magnificence". This is similar to the words that describe the High Priest's garments³. The mantle was the sign of authority, that you were "a man of God" - or even "the man of God". In the 1st century, the Romans controlled the High Priest's garments and "leased" them to the highest bidder. There's even a case where even Paul did not know that the High Priest was in his presence since he was not in the priestly garment⁴. The point is that 'the garments define the role'.

But Elisha was apparently not willing to take on the role. He was not willing to be Israel's prophet – at least not yet. Instead, he wanted to follow Elijah and be his assistant – a disciple of sorts. And that's just what he did!

This was a classic 'failure to launch' moment. Even though YHWH was confident He could do the job - thus telling Elijah to anoint him - Elisha apparently, did not. This is the case of many men, and therefore God tells a man to -

¹ 2 Kings 9:1-3

² What about David? Though he was anointed king of Israel by Samuel, his kingship started King Saul was slain, and only by Judah first (2 Sam. 2:4), then by Israel (2 Sam. 5:3)

³ Exodus 28:2

⁴ Acts 23:1-5



NKJ **Genesis 2:24** "... leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife ..."

The point is this – a man needs to become his own man so he can be effective at what he is called to do. That's the way it was for Yeshua's disciples – they needed to get out on their own, and thus Yeshua told them -

NKJ **John 16:7** "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

In other words, there was no need for the 'Helper' (Holy Spirit) to come if Yeshua was still guiding their every action. Men have to get out on their own, and such was the case with Elisha.

As the story continues, we see Elijah continued to do the job of Israel's prophet. He performed two official duties - 1) He confronted Ahab concerning the murder of Naboth for his vineyard⁵, and 2) he confronted Ahab's son Ahaziah about soliciting a prophecy from a pagan god. In neither of these cases was Elisha mentioned. In fact, somewhere along the way, Elijah apparently reclaimed his mantle from him.

The Trip to the Jordan River

We don't know what provoked Elijah to head toward Judea. It could be that with Judah's king Jehoshaphat's advanced age, YHWH wanted Elijah to begin to prophesy in Judea to deal with whatever person would follow Jehoshaphat as king. This would leave Elisha as Israel's prophet. Again – we don't know, but the story continues with 2 Kings 2 –

NKJ **2 Kings 2:1-2a** And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ² Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel."

Apparently YHWH sent Elijah to Bethel hoping that Elisha would stay in Gilgal, but that's not what happened. Elisha went with him stating that –

NKJ **2 Kings 2:2b** As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel."

As they approached the city, the Son's of the Prophets came out to meet them and told Elisha –

NKJ **2 Kings 2:3** "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

When I read this, it seems to be saying –

"You know, YHWH is about to take Elijah from you and you're going to have to stand on your own two feet."

And Elisha's response was –

"Yes - I know, so shut up".

It appears that Elisha was beginning to figure things out. Not only was Elijah telling him to stay behind and stop following him, now his associates were telling him the same thing.

This happened again as they left Bethel for Jericho (2 Kings 2:4-5) and again upon leaving Jericho for the Jordan River - except this time, fifty of the Sons of the Prophets followed them for a while – watching them from a distance to see what was going to happen (2 Kings 2:6-7), and indeed something did happen.

⁵ 1 Kings 21:17



The text says –

NKJ **2 Kings 2:8** Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled *it* up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.

Elisha had just witnessed Elijah doing something that only Moses and Joshua had done before – the parting of a body of water that could be walked through on dry land! "That was awesome" he probably thought, then finally realized that Elijah just wanted him to be able to do the same type of things. By doing so, Elisha could make an impact on Israel's people and kings.

As they crossed the Jordan, and after realizing he would need help to do his job, Elisha asked for a double portion of the Spirit that YHVH had bestowed on Elijah. Elijah, of course, did not have the authority to bestow that spirit, so He left it up to YHVH saying –

NKJ **2 Kings 2:10** "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me *when I am* taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*."

So Elijah instructed Elisha to watch for a sign, and that sign would be that Elijah would be taken from him. Note that there is no indication that this would happen soon, but apparently it did.

The next verse is important in that we see a change in their behavior -

NKJ **2 Kings 2:11** Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Did you see what happened? A flaming chariot appeared and a whirlwind sucked Elijah off the ground and lifted him up into heaven, but before that happened, Elijah and Elisha began to talk to each other as they were walking! That was something new! On the previous legs of this trip, there is no indication they talked with each other on the way. Elijah was always leading the way, and Elisha – as he had done from the beginning - was following. This time they were walking side by side and could therefore carry on a conversation.

So what changed?

Elisha apparently realized that **He was the anointed prophet of God**, and thus was beginning to act that way. He was finally in agreement with Elijah. It reminds me of another prophet who said –

NKJ **Amos 3:3** Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Since both were now in agreement with each other - and with YHVH - who had always intended for Elisha to be the Prophet to Israel - it was time for Elijah and Elisha to separate - time for Elisha to stop following Elijah. How did that come about? It's quite simple. YHVH provided Elijah with a vehicle that Elisha could not follow. He gave Elijah a chariot.

The text states that a chariot with at least two horses **separated** Elisha from Elijah, who then ascended in a whirlwind⁶ to heaven, but not before dropping his mantle for Elisha to use. The sign appeared and Elisha's request of a double portion of the Holy Spirit would be satisfied.

As Elisha was watching, he cried out -

⁶ There is no indication that Elijah boarded the Chariot of Fire. Instead the scriptures state that he ascended in a whirlwind.



NKJ **2 Kings 2:12** ... "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.

The statement "the chariot of Israel and its horsemen" was a final salute to a man who had such a tremendous impact on his people. I believe YHVH used the chariot to separate Elisha from Elijah so that Elisha would eventually rise up to the same stature as Elijah by removing paganism from Samaria just as Elijah did. Evidence of that is in the fact that the same phrase "the chariot of Israel ..." was later repeated by Israel's King Joash to Elisha just before Elisha's death⁷.

Elisha then rent his "own" clothes (not the mantle), a common act of mourning the death or loss of a loved one, but also a sign of separation⁸.

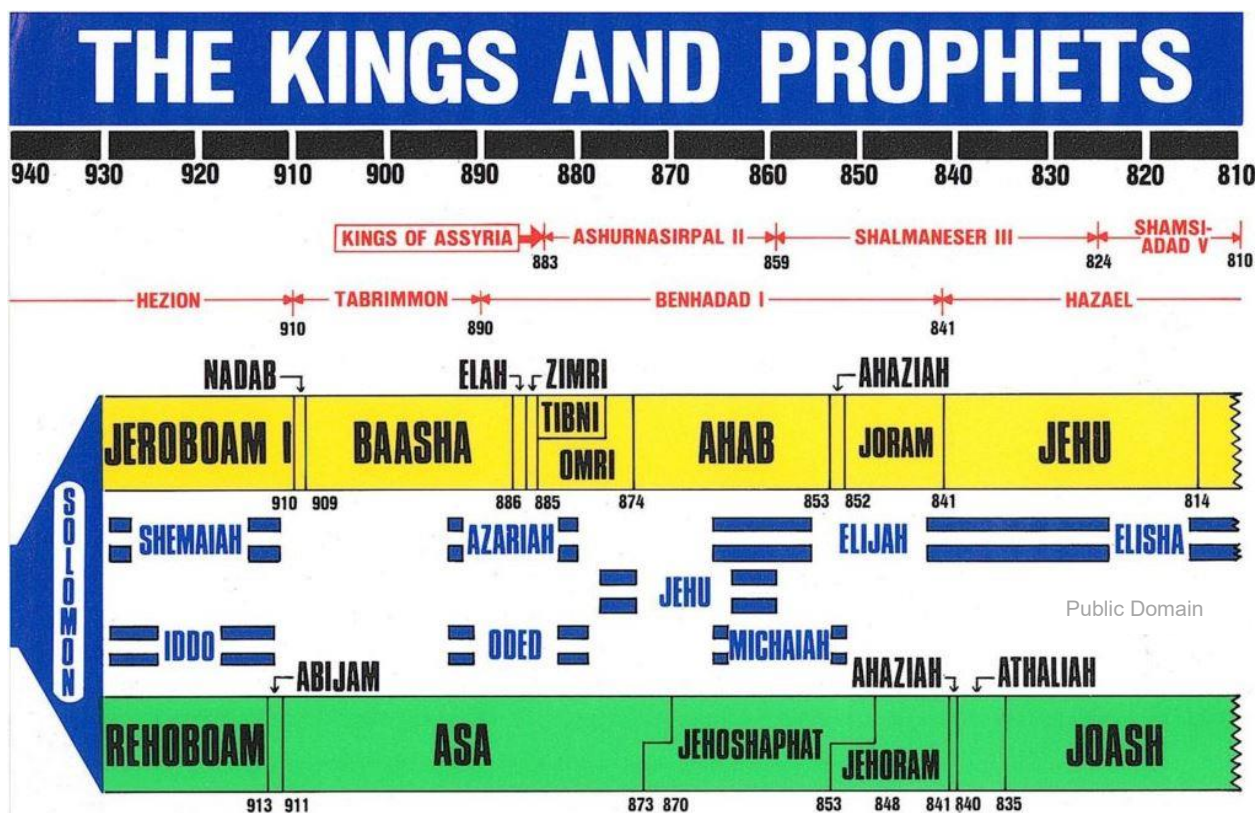
So we are left with a question – "to which 'heaven' did the whirlwind take Elijah"?

Which Heaven?

Was it the first heaven, the throne of God? Was it the second heaven, the place where the stars abide? Or was it the third heaven – the atmosphere where the clouds, tornados, and whirlwinds form? Since Elijah was taken by a whirlwind, the only plausible answer would be the third heaven – the only heaven where a whirlwind could exist.

So if he only went up into the atmosphere - something that would be impossible then, but commonplace today - where did he come back down?

If you look at a chart of the kings of Israel and Judah, you will notice that after the death of Judah's King Jehoshaphat, there was no prophet in Judah until Isaiah came along some ninety years later.



⁷ 2 Kings 13:14

⁸ 1 Kings 11:29-32 - YHVH showed Jeroboam that the Kingdom of Israel was going to be divided by tearing a garment into many pieces.



You will also notice that it was during the later years of Jehoshaphat that Elijah went up in the whirlwind. It's quite likely that God "dropped" him somewhere in northeast Judea where he could have contact with Judah's kings⁹. We have evidence that that was indeed the case. Sometime after Elijah was taken up, he apparently wrote a letter to King Jehoram of Judah – Jehoshaphat's successor. The scripture says –

NKJ 2 Chronicles 21:12-15 And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the LORD God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, ¹³ but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, *who were* better than yourself, ¹⁴ behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction -- your children, your wives, and all your possessions; ¹⁵ and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.

The scripture then begins to show how it happened -

NKJ 2 Chronicles 21:16-19 Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who *were* near the Ethiopians. ¹⁷ And they came up into Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. ¹⁸ After all this the LORD struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. ¹⁹ Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers.

How can we pinpoint when that letter was written? We do it by tracking the reign of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah based on the scriptures. Looking at the chart below we see that:

Timing of Elijah' Letter																																					
based on the kings of Judah and Israel																																					
Jehoshaphat shares kingship with Jehoram after his 18 th year as king >>> ¹ Elijah warns Ahaziah (Israel) that he will die >>>												² Jehoshaphat seeks Elisha's council>>>				³ Jehoshaphat dies>>>				<<< Jehoram (Judah) is "established". He kills his brothers (2 Chron. 21:4)						<<< Elijah's letter to Jehoram (Judah) arrives 2 Chronicles 21:12-20											
◀ + 5 Years Jehoshaphat 1 Kings 22:41-42												Jehoshaphat/Jehoram (co-regency)				Jehoram (Judah) 2 Kings 8:16; 2 Chron. 21:20						Ahaziah															
◀ + 9 Years Ahab 1 Kings 16:29												Ahaziah 1 Kings 22:51		(Je)Horam (Israel) 2 Kings 3:1; 2 Kings 1:17 (sole king)																Jehu 2 Kings 9:1-6							
Elijah the Prophet														Elijah caught up in a whirlwind 2 Kings 2:11-12		Elijah writes letter to Jehoram														Elisha the Prophet							
866	865	864	863	862	861	860	859	858	857	856	855	854	853	852	851	850	849	848	847	846	845	844	843	842	841	840	839	838									

¹ Elijah's last recorded mission (2Kings 1:2-4; 15-17)

² Elisha's first "King/Prophet" encounter (2Kings 3:11)

³ Jehoshaphat dies (1Kings 22:42-45)

- 1 Kings 16:29 – Ahab reigned 22 years
- 1 Kings 22:41-42 - Jehoshaphat became king in the Judah in the 4th year of Ahab, King of Israel and reigned for 25 years, but during the final 5-6 years of his reign, he shared the throne with his son Jehoram. (see 2 Kings 8:16)
- 1 Kings 22:51 – Ahaziah became king in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat and reigned for about two years
- 2 Kings 3:1 - Horam (Israel) became king in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat and reigned 12 years

⁹ Philip was also 'taken up', but we later find him teaching in another place (**Acts 8:39-40**)



- 2 Kings 9:1-6 – Jehu became king at the death of Horam
- 2 Kings 8:16 – Jehoram shares the throne with his father, but become the sole king at the death of his father which coincides with the 5th year of Horam of Israel. Jehoram is sole king for 8 more years.

So we have the kings of both Israel and Judah set in order. Let's now look at significant events mentioned in scripture:

- 2 Kings 1:2-4; 15-17 – Elijah warns Israel's king Ahaziah that he will die. This is the last recorded mission by Elijah
- 2 Kings 3:11 – Jehoshaphat seeks Elisha's council. This is Elisha's first recorded official act.
 - These are the "bookmarks" between which Elijah left in a whirlwind.
- 2 Kings 21:4 - Jehoram (Judah) is "established" following the death of his father, and thus kills his brothers, something he would not have done while his father was still alive.
 - This is one of the charges against King Jehoram in Elijah's letter.
- Elijah's letter arrived at least two years before Jehoram died, but not before he killed his brothers.

By reading the context, we can place Elijah's ascension sometime after Elijah's conversation with Ahaziah and before Elisha's conversation with Jehoshaphat. What's more, we can conclude – based on Elijah's letter – that he was still alive and well nine or ten years after the Chariots of Fire event.

So it's clear that Elijah did not go to heaven as some claim. Instead, it appears that he lived out the remainder of his life as a prophet to the kings of Judah.

So what can we learn from this study?

Conclusion

We can learn that -

- In order to understand this and other difficult scriptures, we should take into account the BIBLE'S definition of common terms such as "Heaven".
- We should understand that the Bible's characters (in this case – Elisha) were all HUMAN and had various flaws.
- We should discover the Hebrew or Greek meanings of words to help understand their real meaning
- We must always frame our Biblical understanding within the context of ALL the scriptures and believe that the Bible does not contradict itself.

Shalom Aleichem