

Yehoshua ben Levi and Elijah

Tales of the Talmud with Rabbi Nick Renner

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Elijah while he was standing at the entrance of the cave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. He asked Elijah, “Do I have a place in the world to come?” Elijah replied, “If the master desires it.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said to himself, “I saw two but I heard the voice of a third.”

He asked the prophet, “When will the Messiah come?” Elijah answered, “Go and ask him.” Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked, “Where will I find him?” “He is sitting at the entrance of Rome.” “And by what signs will I identify him?” “He sits among those who suffer with lesions. All of them unwrap and bind up their sores at the same time. But the one who is the Messiah unties and binds up one at a time, thinking: ‘If I am summoned I will not have to delay.’”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went to him and said: *Shalom alecha*,¹ my master and teacher. The Messiah replied: *Shalom alecha*, ben Levi. Rabbi Yehoshua asked: When will the master come? He replied, “Today.”

Rabbi Yehoshua returned to Elijah who said to him, “What did he say to you?” “He said to me, ‘Peace be upon you, ben Levi.’” Elijah explained, “With his greeting he has promised both you and your father a place in the world to come.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “But he lied to me by saying, ‘Today I will come,’ but he has not come.” Elijah replied, “He was quoting a verse. This is what he said to you, ‘Today—if you will listen to His voice.’”²

-Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 98A

Translation by Rabbi Steven Sager

¹ Peace onto you

²Psalm 95:7